University of Alberta

Resistant to White? "Race", Masculinity, and Representation in Skateboard Culture

by

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Canada

For Melanie

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION- WHY SKATEBOARDING? WHY NOW? 1
"Method(ology) Air" 5
References 8

CHAPTER 1 – HOW DO WE STUDY SKATE-/SNOWBOARDING? 10
Subcultural Studies – Resistance and Incorporation 13
Problems with Resistance and Incorporation 16
The Binary Trap 17
Girls on the Side 19
Retheorizing Resistance and Incorporation 21
Authenticity, "Selling Out", and the Big Bad Media 26
References 31

CHAPTER 2- MEDIA AND THE CREATION OF BOARDING CULTURE 39
References 49

CHAPTER 3 – ROAD RASH AND "BLACKLASH": SKATEBOARDING AND THE MASCULINE FLIGHT FROM MIDDLE-CLASS WHITENESS 53
Poor White Guys, Backlash Politics, and Sport 55
Popular Narratives of Renegade White Masculinity 59
Skateboarding and the White Male "Outsider" 63
Conclusion: The Market and White Male "Blacklash" 74
References 80

CONCLUSION: SKATEBOARDING AFTER WHITENESS 92
White on White on Black, Or, The Role of a Cultural Theorist 95
A Critical Pedagogy of Whiteness 97
Is there Skateboarding After Whiteness? 100
References 104

Introduction: Why Skateboarding? Why Now?

For the last three years I have been attending the *Vans Warped Tour* – a summer festival featuring punk and hip-hop acts performing alongside "alternative" sports, most notably skateboarding. Each summer I witness what can only be described as youthful empowerment through unarticulated protest. Throughout the years, however, as '*Warped* expands its rosters and venues, it has attracted a great deal of corporate attention. The summer of 2002, for instance, featured Jim Lindberg of the punk band Pennywise screaming, "Fuck Authority", amidst a stage-sized placard for Target department stores, a co-sponsor of the event (lest we "fuck with *capitalist* authority"). And while the oppositional qualities of rap and punk were axiomatic, I wondered about the significance of skateboarding in this "traveling carnival of angst". What social meaning does skateboarding have that allows it to coalesce with rap and punk? How does skateboarding resemble an oppositional sporting practice? For some reason, Kevin Lyman (the tour's promoter) found it meaningful, and profitable, to couple skateboarding with oppositional music. Surely he is not the first to do so, but the absolute spectacle of Lyman's show is most revealing. In 2003, '*Warped* drew approximately 500,000 spectators, each charged CAN$45, from forty-five cities across North America (de Vries, 2003). Since its inception, the tour has experienced an annual average growth of 138% ("Vans Warped Tour Kickoff", 2000). Evidently, the rhetoric of rebellion is big business!

As I soon discovered, however, commercialism was not the only contradiction at the festival. Despite the anti-fascist rhetoric at '*Warped*, the audience I observed (from live shows and video footage of other venues) and helped comprise was largely white youth. (As I was on the periphery of the age demographic, surely a bevy of punks and skaters was convinced I was a NARC.) More importantly, my look at so-called resistant sports has moved beyond an exclusive class-based critique to include the contradictions of race. Both skateboarding and punk seemed to be a curiously white expression of revolt against authority – including whiteness. And while punk culture is widely explained both within and beyond academia, its athletic sidekick, skateboarding, is relatively understudied. As the popularity and marketability of "oppositional" festivals like

'*Warped* soar, skateboard culture becomes increasingly visible in popular and alternative media.

Although levels of participation plateau in the early 2000s (about 12 million Americans over the age of six years), skate culture is enjoying a watershed of media exposure.[1] Several television programs are devoted to skateboarding (*Tony Hawk's Gigantic Skatepark Tour*, *Concrete Wave*, etc.), which, in turn, have created spin-offs (*BAMTV*, *Boom Boom Huck Jam Tour*). As a result, skateboarding has been used to sell everything from underarm deodorant to Bagel Bites (Sales of which soared 26% only eight weeks after endorsing the *X-Games* and Tony Hawk [Cleland, 2001]). As it circulates alongside its countercultural companions like hip-hop and punk, skateboarding has become increasingly profitable. Thus, it is an appealing area of market demographics, youth culture, as well as academic research.

This study is mapped into three episodes. The first chapter provides an overview of the ways in which skate- and snowboarding have been studied in the past. Researchers of "extreme" sports rely heavily on a subcultural framework that is, in my view, dated. The few studies of boarders that do exist have worked from a template that is particularly attentive to resistance and incorporation through the commodity form – the very concepts popularized by several theorists working from the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in the 1970s. Humphreys (2003), for instance, links boarding with punk movements whereby both cultures display an innate hostility to commercial cooptation. Other studies (cf. Beal & Weidman, 2003; Beal, 1995, 1996) evaluate skate culture by its proclivity to subvert the dominant social order. To understand the scholarly work on skateboarding, I briefly review the general framework of subcultural studies and how they have been useful in explaining youth sport culture.

Subcultural studies may help us explore some practices of contemporary youth. They are, however, historically limited to an explanation of working-class youth subcultures in 1970s Britain. As such, I critique a bevy of cultural studies that operate

[1] Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association (2001).

from production/consumption paradigms. This first chapter exposes the limitations of working from a binary fixed in resistance and incorporation. Such a dualism may obfuscate the complexities and contradictions of the commercial boarding culture. As a result, boarders are at once dissident and conformist, an idea that certainly complicates a cooptation theory. In addition, there is a certain masculine overtone in many subcultural studies that must not go unchecked. While my own work, in a way, repeats an androcentric outlook, I try to be critical of patriarchy and the valorization of masculinity in skate culture. Quite simply, girls are absent from most skate media. For this reason, claims of transgression must be openly and steadily challenged. Indeed, a saturation of white men in skateboard media undermines any theory of resistance. This relates to what is deemed "authentic" or legitimate in skate culture.

Several subcultural studies are predicated on a romantic notion of anti-capitalist authenticity. Thus, only those individuals who avoid commodification and subvert the dominant values are considered legitimate. Time and again, as the litany of subcultural studies suggests, these subversives are white males. Most boarding literature echoes this "purist" authenticity proffered by the Birmingham School. Authenticity, as it is constructed in popular and alternative media, is often racially and sexually limiting. While a subcultural rebellion existing outside the tendrils of capitalism may have been tangible in 1970s Britain, it has become problematic in recent years. I suggest that a retheorizing of resistance is vital to our understanding of youth (sub)cultures in the present socio-economic climate. By rethinking resistance, we are better able to cope with current issues surrounding authenticity (a slippery term from the outset) and media representations of race and gender. The ways in which skateboarding and authenticity are established in media provide the focus for the following chapters.

Chapter 2 introduces a framework for the textual analysis that is to follow. It explores the extent to which subcultures are created by popular press, television, and Internet. Essentially, subcultures cannot be studied without looking at their media. This task involves unpacking media forms into more tangible elements. Following Thornton (1996), there are various types of media within skate culture ranging from popular

(ESPN's *X-Games*, *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* videogames) to niche (*TransWorld* magazine) and micro (Independently-produced skate videos). Moreover, different media forms (popular v. alternative, televisual v. print) construct different skateboard paradigms (vertical v. street skateboarding). Assorted methods of distribution, circulation, and production also point to a political economy of skate media. This chapter explores the ways in which skateboarding is mobilized within media to market products, which sometimes creates a caricature of skate culture. Yet popular media is no longer theorized as a monolithic predator, anxiously defusing subcultural insurgency. Skaters, for instance, often benefit and generate careers by appearing in magazines and videos. Alternative media can validate professional skaters by proving to the subcultural audience their skill level and "street cred" (Stricker, 2004). Doubtless, media is an important part of subcultures. As such, we need to look at how subculturalists are represented in both popular and alternative media. This constitutes the third and final chapter.

Chapter 3 is largely a response to previous studies of alternative sports and whiteness. From the outset, I am working against the argument that suggests all white male dissent is symptomatic of backlash politics. Instead of viewing alternative games as a reterritorialization of white masculinity in sport, I interpret boarding imagery as a paradoxical disavowal of whiteness (read: middle-class conformity) by predominantly white males. In this sense, it may be more useful to historicize boarders with the likes of Beat icon Jack Kerouac. The privileges of being white are consciously rejected rather than reasserted.

Initially, I sketch out the existing "crisis" in white masculinity vis-à-vis identity politics and civil rights struggles. I explain the current climate of white male backlash and how some cultural texts, including alternative sports, have been located within the politics of the conservative right. Many critical studies of whiteness describe a monolithic model of white male rebellion. They describe an "angry white male" who makes blatant claims of marginality in an effort to reassert the tacit privileges of being white, heterosexual, and male. Such studies, however, forego an alternative expression of white male dissent found in countercultural texts. This chapter offers a reading of two important

narratives that exemplify this white resistance: Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) and Norman Mailer's *White Negro* (1957).

While these texts are problematic for a number of reasons, they may help us understand the constructed resistance of skate culture. Both countercultural and skateboarding media offer a version of whiteness that is predicated on a refusal of "whiteness". In this sense, they represent a complicated response to the reductive decree of white male backlash. Like the Beats and Mailer's white hipster, skaters often adopt the signifiers of a mythical black masculinity. This is used, I argue, to symbolically challenge the perceived banalities of being white. Skateboard texts, as a result, represent a contradictory escape from a fantasy of middle-class whiteness. Rather than celebrate such racial transgression, however, we must be attentive to the ways in which a fabricated "blackness" functions not only in skate culture, but also within the global marketplace. As such, I conclude this chapter with a look at the political economy of blackness. This also points to the shortcomings of dualisms in skate media and my own work. Race, as it appears in my study, is situated in a binary of black and white. This is because skate media reproduces such a dualism by adopting racial signifiers. Race is unambiguously coded as white or black, which subsumes Asian and Latino influences. To decode representations, I utilize – in hopes of discrediting – a troublesome racial binary perpetuated by skate media. Studying such representations within the parameters of the binary exposes the limitations of dualistic reasoning. And so throughout this study I try to avoid a blind endorsement of resistance in boarding. As I contend, racial appropriation presents a new set of complications surrounding gender relations and romanticization of the oppressed. Yet it also provides cultural studies with a timely tempering of white male backlash politics.

"Method(ology) Air"[2]

To study skateboarding, I have selected a textual analysis – an oft-criticized methodology of the Birmingham theorists – for several reasons. On one level, reading texts provides

[2] A "Method Air" is a skateboard trick performed in ramp or vertical riding whereby the rider arches her/his back and grabs toward the heels

greater space to explore a diversity of cultural studies not limited to production or consumption. By using a textual analysis, I am able to look at the *production* of ideology and how it is mobilized to arouse *consumption*. That is, representations of race and gender in skate media are used to market the sport and its ancillary products. In addition, a turn to textual analysis emphasizes the importance of ideological critique in cultural studies. Media, Kellner (1995) argues, create models of identity from which we negotiate our own subjectivities. In this sense, media often provide us with the materials through which our identities are constructed. A reliance on textual analysis, then, emphasizes the importance of representation, identity formation, and ideological critique in cultural studies. Both popular and alternative media, by framing and describing a subculture, help create skateboarding. Thus, if skateboarding is solely depicted as a white activity, it may be reproduced, at the level of practice, as a white activity.

Representations of skateboarding also provide models of social relations. While alternative masculinities are offered, an underlying patriarchy remains a consistent element of skate culture. Indeed, an absence of females in popular and alternative media speaks volumes about the so-called resistance of skate culture. Rebellion, of course, is difficult to substantiate regardless of methodology (Thornton, 1996). While at a semiotic level I may offer readings of resistance, my work is partial without an ethnographic counterpart. Indeed, media production and consumption are equally important in cultural studies. Yet an analysis of textual construction allows greater space for a more theoretically informed polemic. As a result, I am able to study the representations of race that help create our identities.

This study of race in skateboarding is not limited to myths of "blackness". On the contrary, it focuses primarily on representations of, and a departure from, whiteness. As Aanerud (1997) explains, "Reading whiteness into texts that are not overtly about race is an essential step toward disrupting whiteness as the unchallenged racial norm" (p.43). In this sense, decoding whiteness in skate media is a cornerstone of praxis in critical whiteness studies. A focus on text alone allows me to explore the ways in which race and gender are expressed through the spectacle of sport. Also, such an analysis potentially

unpacks both dominant and resistant ideologies as they appear in the market economy. Skateboarding, evidently, is not only a popular leisure activity for the youthful-minded, it is also a multi-million dollar industry. As a result, it is important to interpret the emissaries of capital: media texts and advertisements of skate culture. By studying such narratives, it is possible to situate skateboarding within a larger political economy of youth culture. Such a project would dwindle if operating through ethnography alone. A critique of the skateboard market, and the impresarios of such a culture, helps define whom actually skateboards, i.e., the very subjects of an ethnography. Textual analysis, then, allows me to unpack ideology, representation, and political economy of skateboard culture. Without question, my project is partial so long as it casts actual consumption to the periphery. Yet a large part of the very consumption I ignore is dependent upon the images, narratives, and texts of skate media that I *do* study. My reasons for pursuing a textual project are determined largely by its potential to explore myriad subcultural theories as they respond to the cultural representation of skateboarding.

This project has the potential to make several important contributions to cultural studies in general, and youth culture in particular. The existing academic literature on subcultures provides little interpretation of mediated narratives of youth culture as well as "normative subcultures". By using multiple viewpoints, however, I am able to take the commodification of rebellion to the next level and explore issues surrounding identity and the political economy of subcultural media. As media forms have multiplied over the years, it is increasingly important to investigate the Internet and video games, in addition to television and print. And by studying such media, this project will focus on representations of white masculinity in skate culture. While skateboarding and snowboarding are similar in styles and fashions, there is certainly an economic discontinuity. The costs of lift tickets and equipment in snowboarding are markedly greater than the frugality of skateboarding. Although race, class, and gender are prominent aspects of both sports, space allows for a concentrated focus on only one culture. And with a greater familiarity with skateboarding – as both a participant and observer – I have opted to study the board with wheels, as opposed to wax. Nevertheless, there are some important arguments made below that may equally apply to snowboard

culture. At the discursive level, at least, there is an apparent escape from whiteness in both skate- and snowboarding.

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Chapter 1 – How do we Study Skate-/Snowboarding?

Alternative sports across North America are enjoying popularity like never before. In America, 9.6 million people skateboarded in 2001 (Woudhuysen, 2001). Over a ten-year period, skateboarding has experienced a growth of 1.6 million participants, and its off-season counterpart, snowboarding, has gained 3.7 million riders since 1991 (Woudhuysen, 2001). In Canada, there are over 64 skateparks scattered from Quadra Island, B.C. to Windsor, Nova Scotia. In fact, Vancouver, B.C. is home to the largest skateboarding competition in North America – *Vans Slam City Jam*. The event is sponsored by Ford trucks, Right Guard deodorant, NBC, Fox, and even Tylenol ("For those gnarly crashes, take___"). With such recognition, skateboarding is now a constant staple of electronic media. Since the inception of the *X-Games*, Disney's ESPN has televised over 900 hours of "action sports" each year (Bennett, Henson, & Zhang, 2003). In fact, 61% of all youth categorized as Generation Y (those born between 1977 and 1994) regularly watch action sports on television (Bennett, Henson, & Zhang, 2003). This astounding viewership, however, pales in comparison to market values. While the total sales of skateboards and attire in 1996 were $500 million, the figures are now over $1.4 billion per annum (Woudhuysen, 2001). As the culture of skateboarding becomes a global phenomenon, it also becomes a peculiarly interesting subject of academic study. Although skateboarding has experienced extensive commercial exposure in recent years, it has remained relatively unexplored in academia. As such, how are we to study skate-/snowboarding cultures?

To respond to such a query, it is important to review the existing academic literature on skateboarding and snowboarding. It will be shown that current studies of boarders tend to use a subcultural framework. That is, both skate and snowboard cultures have been evaluated by their penchant for subverting the "mainstream". With few exceptions, studies of boarders all entertain notions of resistance to a dominant social order. Beal (1995, 1996, 2003), for instance, emphasizes skaters' rebellion from both mainstream culture and traditional team sports. In her study of a Colorado skateboard competition she notes, "the most blatant form of resistance revealed in this study was the

opposition to the corporate bureaucratic forms of sports" (1995, p.254). This includes a refusal of competition, extrinsic rewards, elitism, as well as corporate sponsorship. Similarly, Heino (1999) describes snowboarding as a form of "resistance to materialism and separation of mind and body" insofar as it indoctrinates "a holistic view of nature that [is] similar to Zen Buddhism" (p.183). In addition, these theorists describe a refusal of adult male authority as an implicit aspect of boarding (Beal, 1996; Heino, 1999). Thus, board sports have been described as a "postmodern site of resistance" (Beal, 1996). As the "postmodern" may imply, this transgression contains several contradictions in which both Beal and Anderson (1999) are careful to point out.

In an article examining alternative masculinity, Beal again notes the subversive tendencies of skateboarding: "The subculture resisted many of the tenets of organized sport and of hegemonic masculinity with particular regard to the deference to adult male authority in formal structures" (1996, p.207). This transgression, she suggests, is not without concessions. While certain hegemonic forms of masculinity are challenged – physical domination and ruthless competition – others remain intact – rugged individualism and risking bodily injury (Beal, 1996; Heino, 1999; Anderson, 1999). What is more, Beal's skaters "reproduced patriarchal relations" whereby the activity was largely reserved for males (1996, p.212). Anderson also notes how heterosexuality in snowboard culture is enforced through a denigration of perceived "gayness" in ski culture: "skiers are fags" (1999, p.64). While Beal and Heino have been attentive to resistance and contradiction, they have also examined the familiar subcultural terrain of authenticity.

Authenticity in skateboarding culture, according to Beal and Weidman (2003), is largely decided upon by its members. In this sense, cultural legitimacy comes from below. Authenticity, as it were, cannot be proclaimed by any one skate company since subcultural legitimacy is determined by its users – the skaters themselves (Beal & Weidman, 2003). Skaters, and their discriminatory consumption, act as a gatekeeper guarding against any capricious corporation seeking to capitalize on a growing trend (i.e., Nike, Taco Bell, and Pepsi). In a paradoxical way, then, skaters remain vigilant of

incorporation through the meta-commodity form. Cooptation, somewhat removed from its original meaning proffered by early subcultural studies, is now the incarnate of larger mainstream corporations who fail to display an historical commitment to skateboarding. "Selling out" has a vestigial importance in skateboard culture and it also remains a popular theme in other studies of boarding, not least of which are those undertaken by Humphreys (1997; 2003).

While remarkably informative of the snowboarding industry, Humphreys's studies remain grounded in a resistance/incorporation binary. As a result, his work is most similar to "old school" subcultural studies insofar as it endorses, and conversely laments, resistance and transgression in snowboarding cultures. In an effort to reify its resistance, he describes the tenuous marriage between boarding and punk: "Skateboarding resonated with punk, with its followers declaring skating as 'the only punk approved sport'. Skateboarding was an ideologically 'pure' physical activity, far removed from that tainted institution – sport" (Humphreys, 1997, p.150). In other passages, Humphreys draws parallels between punks "do-it-yourself" philosophy and the symbolic creativity of boarding, all the while endorsing an overtly politicized resistance to "social definitions of classed space" (Humphreys, 1997, p.157). Elsewhere, he rightly historicizes the hostile reaction of the ski industry to the encroachment of "heathen" boarders (Humphreys, 2003).

There is also a romantic nostalgia for a pre-commercial subculture running throughout Humphreys's work. In prose not unlike that of any Birmingham theorist, he explains how "certain youth subcultures, such as the counterculture, punk, rave, and grunge, act as 'testing grounds' for new styles which capitalism then appropriates" (Humphreys, 1997, p.158). By this logic, fringe cultures exist outside the commercial nexus of capitalism, despite the fact that boarding is largely dependent on conspicuous consumption. To become a boarder one must evidently purchase a snowboard/skateboard.

Several of the ideas popularized by the University of Birmingham's CCCS remain active in subcultural studies. This is particularly true of research regarding skateboarding

and snowboarding. As Beal (forthcoming) admits, "I framed my research within a hegemonic perspective, drawing especially on previous insights of the subcultural theory emanating from the CCCS, examining the ways in which youth subculture resisted the 'mainstream'" (p.2). Indeed, resistance remains the decisive factor for evaluating board cultures. As a result, most studies have attempted to explain incorporation, authenticity, and commercial contradiction. To understand and improve upon previous studies of boarding it is useful to reevaluate the subcultural foundations from which they operate. Perhaps a renovation of subcultural theory – in particular, rethinking resistance and incorporation – will better equip the following study of boarders. In the next section, I reevaluate resistance, authenticity, and incorporation by way of a sustained critique of the existing subcultural studies. In doing so, I position myself for a more productive and updated critique of boarding, and more importantly, of the media by which the culture is created.

Subcultural Studies – Resistance and Incorporation

While resistance and incorporation have been modified from its earlier usage at the Birmingham School, acts of transgression remain a popular topic. Rebellion and cooptation have simply assumed refurbished meanings. In this section, I study theories of resistance and incorporation by evaluating the existing subcultural framework. I set out to explain the over-employed template of ritual resistance and cooptation pioneered (with some help from Gramsci) by the CCCS. In addition, I evaluate the applicability of such principles to the subculture of boarding. Many cultural studies that endorse either a romantic notion of resistance, or an uncritical celebration of consumptive empowerment, do not translate well into skate culture. As a result, this study is less concerned with excavating acts of subversion than explaining the representation of the rhetoric of rebellion.

The most influential research on subcultural studies is commonly attributed to the Birmingham school of cultural studies (Epstein, 1997). Many Birmingham scholars situated youth in a relationship of resistance and domination. Most notably, Hall and Jefferson (1976), Hebdige (1979), and P. Cohen (1972) endorsed the symbolic resistance

and refusal of skinheads, punks, mods, and teddies. While these studies are at times very different from one another, they seem to share an interest in exhuming a notion of (male) youth resistance through subcultural practice. Style, for instance, was described as an oblique criticism of working-class society in Britain, and a symbolic solution to the inherent contradictions between a puritan work ethic and an ideology of hedonistic consumption (J. Clarke et al., 1975; Hebdige, 1979; McGuigan, 1992; Gelder & Thornton, 1997). For Hebdige, symbolic resistance was aptly demonstrated by the punks' use of bricolage: the practice of appropriating objects from their original context and recoding a meaning unto those objects that is symbolically resistant (Hebdige, 1979). Ewen (1988) explains, "As 'punk' culture arose in working-class Britain, the renegade style provided angry, often unemployed youth with a powerful and – to outsiders – shocking vehicle of expression" (p.251). In this sense, the punks' appropriation of a safety pin driven through one's cheek became a symbol of class conflict and alienation. Similarly, the mod adoption of upper-class clothing was theorized as a symbolic threat to the ruling class. These young adults working dead-end jobs compensated for their subordinated social status by casual drug use, a vibrant nightlife, and mimicking the garbs of those in positions of power – i.e., their employers (Hebdige, 1976). The mods, as During (2000) explains, used "the primary products of the system that disadvantaged them as forms of resistance and grounds on which to construct a communal identity" (p.9).

A subculture's creative appropriation of products was believed to exist at the margins of the commercial process (Hall & Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979; P. Cohen, 1972). That is, theorists privileged the point of subcultural creation, rather than the period of incorporation by the mainstream culture. As a consequence, symbolic resistance of subcultures was doomed to fail since: 1. Protest occurred in the leisure realm (real social change was believed to occur in the sphere of production); and 2. Mass media defused rebellion through the commodity form. Since resistance took place in the leisure sphere, subcultures were decidedly temporary. The efforts of a fringe movement to "win space" did little to challenge the relations of production in a capitalist economic system (Muggleton, 2000). In fact, the system to which subcultures were ostensibly fighting

against was well equipped to housetraining, and thus incorporating the subversive margins of society. Herein lie the early concepts of commercial cooptation.

Since the symbolic resistance of subcultures was believed to take place outside commercial processes, one method of incorporating, and thus neutralizing, the insurgent youth was through the commodity form (Hall & Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979; Brake, 1985). Defusion, according to Clarke (1976), occurs when "a particular style is dislocated from the context and group which generated it, and taken up with a stress on those elements which make it a 'commercial proposition', especially their novelty" (p.188). Essentially, the objects become a part of the very social order to which it once posed a threat. Popularized by the commodity form, a studded wristband, safety pin, or bondage trousers become an aesthetic style devoid of symbolic social criticism and "authenticity" (Hebdige, 1979). The style of the subculture is believed to be commercially cleansed of any subversive meanings. Once the subculture gathers a mainstream following, it supposedly disbands, or at the very least fails to interest academics (Muggleton, 2000). In very succinct terms, this is the general framework of resistance and incorporation theorized by the Birmingham scholars. While positioning youth subcultures in an antagonistic relationship to the State was certainly useful in 1970s Britain, a sea change of socio-political climates requires us to modify subcultural theory.

Whereas the nemesis of the left in 1970s Britain was a conservative government, today it is transnational corporations (Harvey, 1989). Union organization and traditional leftist politics are increasingly difficult to sustain in an era of flexible and global divisions of labor. In addition, as Harvey (1989) notes, "the production of culture has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel seeming goods…at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential function to aesthetic innovation and experimentation" (p.63). This means culture can no longer be theorized as existing outside the grasp of capitalism: "precisely because capitalism is expansionary and imperialistic, cultural life in more and more areas gets brought within the grasp of the cash nexus and the logic of capital circulation" (Harvey, 1989, p.344). According to early subcultural studies, this suggests

the points between authentic subculture and fabricated facsimile increasingly collapse, making it difficult to resuscitate any notion of pre-capitalist legitimacy – a romanticized aspect of British youth subcultures during the 1970s. Yet this should not sound the death knell of subcultures altogether.

Early subcultural studies are fundamentally flawed for one important reason: research was discontinued after the point of incorporation. In actuality, members of a subculture constantly alter their style, practices and argot to counteract the "popular" (Muggleton, 2000; Borden, 2001). Moreover, subcultural studies have generally ignored the ways in which the so-called mainstream changed by incorporating fringe movements. Perhaps cooptation neutralizes radical dissent, but it also alters the existing hegemony. Indeed, fringe cultures are more than marketable, yet the commodification of difference – such as punk and rap – can occasionally provoke oppositionality within the mainstream (Kellner, 1995). As Whannel (2002) suggests, "Across the political spectrum, plenty of emergent fragments are around – the politics of ecology, the anti-capitalist movement, vegetarianism, animal rights, travelers, raves, the Countryside Alliance, a new European consciousness" (p.160). In this sense, a monolithic "dominant" culture may have fragmented into a series of coexisting cultures (Muggleton, 2000). If this is the case, subcultural studies of 1970s Britain have grown outdated. It now becomes increasingly important to describe some of these alterations to the canon of subculture and evaluate their suitability to the study of boarders.

Problems with Resistance and Incorporation

The resistance/incorporation thesis of subcultures has been continuously modified since its inception in 1970s Britain. As consumption becomes increasingly privileged in the marketplace, the pre-commercial roots of resistance have been reconceptualized. While presenting a subversive appraisal of youth cultures is both admirable and progressive, there are, nevertheless, problems with such politicized studies. First, an overzealous focus on youth rebellion often ignores the mainstream. Quite simply, the Birmingham theorists neglected to ask, What is the dominant culture to which subcultures resist? Second, the legacy of subcultural studies is generally riddled with masculine overtones. As a result,

many projects have privileged male subcultures and have often ignored the inherent sexism within those groups. Third, resistance is too often theorized as a metapolitical practice set against capitalist relations. Some recent alterations to subcultural studies, it will be shown, reprioritize creativity through consumption. Fourth, an overuse of resistance proper has created flawed conceptions of authenticity and incorporation by the media. All of these problems within subcultural research are made visible when studying alternative sports. I conclude that such a question of resistance/domination is marred from the outset. Unambiguous acts of authentic transgression are difficult to substantiate.

The Binary Trap

While not all subcultural studies commemorate youth resistance, most are inattentive to the mainstream. There is a tendency to describe in detail the subversive group, not the dominant social order. As a result, the mainstream is often vaguely depicted as a timeless model of middle-class white conformity. As Thornton (1996) recognizes, "Inconsistent fantasies of the mainstream are rampant in subcultural studies [and] are probably the single most important reason why subsequent cultural studies find pockets of symbolic resistance wherever they look" (p.93). To validate the creatively resistant youth, theorists have relied on a conformist and banal mainstream counterpart that has become less conceivable in recent years. Evidently, "subculture" presupposes a dualism between fringe and mass society, as if the two were entirely estranged from one another.

By clinging to these early subcultural studies, however, one is inevitably engaged in a binary opposition between resistance/conformity, hip/square, subculture/mainstream that is evermore difficult to escape. And by pitting working-class youth in a class war with the State (or currently, corporate culture), theorists are inevitably locked in a dualism that can only describe those individuals who challenge and those who consent to dominant culture. This has a tendency to "reduce all social forms…too quickly to the obvious class dynamics of domination and resistance" (Muggleton, 2000, p.122). Such binaries are also a stalwart tool of Eurocentric thought whereby a value-laden hierarchy works to construct a sense of Otherness (Goldberg & Quayson, 2002). Youth subcultures are too often described as creative consumers, while the mainstream is denigrated as

passive conformists (Muggleton, 1997). Originality and artistic sensibility are theorized as non-mainstream and beyond the reaches of capitalism, when, in fact, nothing could be further from truth. "Like the young insurgents", argues Frank (1997), "many in American business imagined the counterculture not as an enemy to be undermined or a threat to consumer culture but as a hopeful sign, a symbolic ally in their own struggle…to deplore conformity, distrust routine and encourage resistance to established power" (p.9). Nevertheless, theorists retain a resistance/conformity binary, a "veiled elitism", that allows only two cultural possibilities: conform or resist (Thornton, 1996).

With regards to skateboarding, the mainstream is now misleading insofar as skating is: 1. A popular, and dominant culture for youth; and 2. Fodder for mega sport spectacles like ESPN's *X-Games*. To valorize their own cultural diversity skaters are forced to maintain a rebellious image in an age of hypercommercialism. To do so, however, requires creating the culture to which skaters are rebelling against: the mainstream. Although Beal describes skaters as self-proclaimed nonconformists, there is little explanation as to what exactly the mainstream or conformity itself entails. For Heino, the mainstream is represented by snowboarding's antithesis: skiing. As she explains, "Either you are a skier and practice those cultural norms or you are a snowboarder and participate in that culture" (1999, p.176). In recent years, however, this binary has fallen by the wayside as skiing adopts less traditional maneuvers; "freeskiing" now incorporates railsliding, "big-air-grabs", and even the baggy garbs of the snowboarding culture (Evidently, all of which find their origins in skateboarding). And while a dominant social order is certainly evidenced by traditional team sports, one is left wondering which sport is more conformist: "more Americans rode a skateboard in 2000 than played baseball" (Bennett, Henson, & Zhang, 2003, p.96). That skateboarding has several best-selling video games is indicative of its non-subcultural popularity; although *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* videogame series has sold over 12 million copies, it has been estimated that only 20% of that audience actually ride skateboards (Davis, 2004). Without question, skateboarding is quickly outgrowing its subcultural skin. As its popularity skyrockets, skating becomes that nether region of subcultural studies – the

mainstream.[1] With such popularization, can skateboarding still be theorized as a subculture?

The term "subculture" is predicated upon a subaltern status. In this sense, we may think of these groups as subterranean or fringe by nature. Subcultures, Thornton (1997) explains, "have come to designate social groups which are perceived to deviate from the normative ideals of adult communities" (p.2). While subculture was indeed a useful term to describe underprivileged working-class youth of 1970s Britain, it may be less applicable to a group of youthful-minded, middle-class, white males. The epithet of "subculture", with its marginal connotations, may blind us to the more normative and privileged social standing of some members. Endorsing resistance and romanticizing oppression produces a tendency to overlook racist and sexist subcultural behavior. This has been a persistent problem with many subcultural studies: "The literature on subcultures and youth culture has scarcely begun to deal with the contradictions that patterns of cultural resistance pose in relation to women" (McRobbie, 2000, p.111).

Girls On the Side

To situate youth cultures in a battle involving resistance and incorporation is a particularly masculine trend (McRobbie, 2000). Likewise, to imagine youth perpetually engaged in a struggle is to privilege only spectacular forms of male transgression (Gelder, 1997). Several subcultural researchers (from Hall & Jefferson to Hebdige, Willis, and Frith) exclusively studied male subjects and tended to exaggerate subversive potentialities. Pleasure, if at all mentioned, was automatically cast into a hegemonic struggle that positioned working-class youth against the dominant social order. What is more, "fashion" – a term carrying apparently feminine connotations – was reinterpreted (masculinized) as sartorial revolt, particularly within teddy and mod cultures (McRobbie, 2000). It seems these early theorists could only accept a subcultural interest in clothing, fashion, and personal appearance so long as it was sanitized of its passive, feminine

[1] Spike Jonze, for instance, was an ardent skateboarding photographer prior to directing the films *Being John Malkovich* (1999) and *Adaptation* (2003). And before landing an acting career with such films as *Mallrats* (1995), *Chasing Amy* (1997), *Almost Famous* (2000), and *Vanilla Sky* (2001), Jason Lee was a professional skater and owner of the skate company Stereo (an occupation to which Lee has recently returned).

meanings and re-presented as "subversive style" (cf. Hebdige, 1979). Essentially, the resistance/incorporation thesis is plagued by androcentric undercurrents that threaten to erase female participation in subcultures. Girls' subcultural activities, McRobbie (2000) proposes, "can best be understood by moving away from the 'classic' subcultural terrain marked out as oppositional and creative by numerous sociologists" (p.120). It is also crucial to call into question the sexism and misogyny of male subcultures (a task taken up in Chapter 3).

Throughout the 1990s alternative sports in North America "were predominantly imagined…through the category of a subcultural formation" (Kusz, 2003, p.164). As a result, alternative athletes like skaters, snowboarders, and BMXers were depicted as a socially marginalized group of youth that followed an ideology that supposedly challenged middle-class values (Kusz, 2003). By celebrating the resistance of skaters – real or imagined – we may be ignoring their normative, privileged status as white middle-class males. While skaters may challenge athleticism and some elements of hegemonic masculinity there is certainly an existing patriarchy that has only recently been called into question (Beal & Weidman, 2003). As the following chapters will illustrate, there is nothing "alternative" about gender relations in skateboarding culture. Women, despite their increasing levels of participation, remain objects of the male gaze, appearing primarily as decorative characters or second-rate "betties" in skate media (Beal, 1995; Beal & Wilson, forthcoming). Generally, theorists have depicted subcultures as marginalized groups. This logic may be difficult to sustain insofar as skaters are overwhelmingly middle-class white males. Yet such images prevail, validating a white middle-class male resistance. That is, authenticity in skateboarding cultures is articulated as white and masculine (Beal & Wilson, forthcoming).

While skateboard culture often reflects a patriarchal hegemony, there is also potential for social change. A distancing from traditional sport, coupled with a tenuous marriage to punk culture (i.e., Riot Grrrl: an early 1990s feminist punk movement based out of Olympia, WA), has created space for increased participation and media attention. A weekly television program called *Hardcore Candy* features profiles and updates on

female skate-/snowboarders. Yet this partial achievement within the boarding industry is the exclusive privilege of white women. A guise of "girl power" conceals the overbearing whiteness parlayed by *Hardcore Candy* and industry adverts. So despite the very limited gains of feminism in boarding, authenticity remains powdercoated in whiteness. This, of course, is another problem with the resistance/incorporation thesis: a pre-capitalist authenticity so endemic to subcultural studies is race and gender exclusive. And so it seems that an economic binary between authentic and sell-out actually helps construct a racial Other. Such romanticized authenticity is also nigh impossible to achieve in an era of hypercommodification.

Retheorizing Resistance and Incorporation

Subcultures in 1970s Britain were theorized as resistant to the dominant culture (Malbon, 1998). This means all subcultural activities were cast into a political battle with the mainstream. As McRobbie (1994) rightly observes, the method of analysis at Birmingham in the 1970s depended upon "notions of class and resistance" at odds with "a set of practices which seemed far removed from the politics of class and resistance" (p.160). One of the most important renovations to subcultural studies, then, is the reevaluation of resistance. Whereas early work valorized a metapolitical dissent performed through subcultural style, updated theories have shifted focus away from class conflict. Rather than adopt "shocking styles" to "express displeasure with the status quo" subcultures are now believed to convey resistance through pleasure (Wilson, 2003, p.380). That is, the transgression of youth subcultures is now dispatched to the "politics of everyday life" (Redhead, 1997). This, evidently, has come to include the creative consumption of commodities. To explain this reconfiguration, the works of Willis (1998, 1990), de Certeau (1984), and Wilson (2003) are most useful.

In *Common Culture* (1990), Willis provides an insightful template for cultural empowerment. He outlines two critical concepts in cultural studies: 1. Symbolic creativity, and 2. Grounded aesthetics. For Willis, the two concepts are not mutually exclusive. Grounded aesthetics involves a "dynamic of symbolic activity and transformation" and refers to the "creative element in a process whereby meanings are

attributed to symbols and practices and where symbols and practices are selected, reselected, highlighted and recomposed to resonate further appropriated and particularized meanings" (1990, p.21). In this sense, individuals indeed consume cultural artifacts, but not necessarily according to their prescribed meanings. There is no commodity capable of determining the ways in which it is used (Willis, 1990). According to Willis (1998), it is the consumer who determines the actual meaning of commodities by the "ways in which [we] use, humanize, decorate and invest with meanings [our] common and immediate life spaces and social practices" (p.547). Resistance, then, becomes reworked as empowerment. What is more, empowerment and the process of identity-creation are now made possible by the offerings of the marketplace. This means "the informal realm of 'leisure' is of vital and increasing importance for the operation of symbolic work as identity-making" (Willis, 1990, p.14). Such an argument is markedly different from the earlier theories of subcultures, which espoused the hollow resistance occurring in the leisure sphere, as opposed to the more fertile realm of production. The privileging of resistance in early studies, Muggleton (2000) notes, "led to a down-playing of subcultural participation in commerce, in the process of purchase and exchange" (p.146).

In a similar vein, de Certeau (1984) explores the ways in which disciplined individuals subvert the dominant order. He differentiates between two conduits of power: "Strategies", on the one hand, refer to the techniques used by dominant institutions, including cultural industries, to control the masses (de Certeau, 1984). "Tactics", on the other hand, describe "the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong, thus lending a political dimension to everyday practice" (de Certeau, 1984, p.488). Consumption, according to de Certeau, is a subversive tactic insofar as it allows agency through creativity. While Willis and de Certeau avoid the parochial notion of commercial incorporation, they also reposition cultural poaching from below. As such, their arguments may help us understand the practice of skateboarding.

Symbolic creativity – the act of imaginatively appropriating a commodity and reinscribing new meanings to the product – is, in no uncertain terms, the raison d'etre of

skateboarding. While skaters certainly purchase the deck, trucks, wheels, and bearings, the possibilities of using that assembled skateboard are virtually endless; "one of skating's most endearing qualities is its near-complete liberation from fiscal exclusivity that defines so much of the American experience. After the initial $100-plus market entry, you're good to go" (Miller, 2004, p.88). And by consuming the skateboard, the urban environment itself becomes recoded as a potential setting for stunts. As skateboard photographer Craig Stecyk explains, "Skaters by their very nature are urban guerillas: they make everyday use of the useless artifacts of the technological burden, and employ the handiwork of the government/corporate structure in a thousand ways that the original architect could never dream of" (Peralta, 2001). In addition, Irvine and Taysom (1998) and Borden (2001) document the ways in which skaters subvert prescribed usages of public space. Instead of using handrails and stairs to assist in consumption of the urban environment, skaters often use these objects to perform stunts in an act of, what I would call, "constructive loitering". These performances are, in fact, similar to Hebdige's bricolage: the "act of transformation by which a new and original style is formed through plunder and recontextualization as a challenge to the hegemony of the dominant culture" (Muggleton, 2000, p.131). In this sense, skateboarding is a potentially transgressive practice that can be aptly understood by using de Certeau's strategies and tactics.

Strategies, by de Certeau's logic, are used to maintain domination in certain environments. Regarding the activity of skateboarding, we may think of civic-sponsored skateparks as a method of surveillance. An ancillary function of skateparks is the disciplining of local skaters. Controlling the locations of skateboarding makes the participants themselves more susceptible to adult surveillance. What is more, the building of skateparks is believed to wean skaters off more commonly used areas like city plazas and staircases. Yet the symbolic creativity of skateboarding is, in my view, the primary reason why civic-sanctioned skateparks will never entirely curb the "loitering" of skaters. Rather than use an apparatus designed and produced for skateboarding, skaters often create their own stunt settings by rearranging artifacts unintended for skating: picnic tables, parking blocks, and plaza ledges. Yet it seems the custodians of private property have also caught on to the skateability of their buildings. They have outfitted common

areas and plaza ledges with decorative "knobs" designed to prevent skaters from sliding and grinding. In the skate community, this strategy is referred to as "spot-knobbing" (Lambert, 2004). Thus, skaters – tacticians by de Certeau's standards – "must continually manipulate events within the system in order to precipitate transient victories constituted by everyday practices" (Lucas, 1999, par.1). However, the consumptive emancipation celebrated by cultural theorists is potentially problematic since capitalism acts as both the object from which one escapes and the process through which escape is provided (Willis, 1998). To create an identity divorced from the banalities of workaday existence, one utilizes the artifacts made available by capitalism. Thus, creative consumption is not necessarily resistant since the leisure realm now takes centre stage in the marketplace (Muggleton, 1997). This, evidently, calls into question the "pleasure as subversive" thesis.

Pleasure, as it were, may just as easily qualify as counter-revolutionary. Yes, legions of youth find entertainment through alternative sports such as the ones showcased on ESPN's *X-Games*. The carnivalesque mise-en-scene may indeed appear to overturn the conservative rules of the larger society. But, to borrow a phrase from Eagleton (citing Shakespeare's Olivia from *Twelfth Night*), "there is no slander in an allowed fool" (Stallybrass & White, 1997, p.296). This means skateboarding can be a particularly empowering act without actually challenging the dominant social order. "Creativity is given free reign as long as it sells goods" (Giroux, 2000, p.66). In response to Willis and de Certeau, then, there is a dangerous tendency to equate consumption with resistance. An unqualified celebration of consumption empowers skaters, despite the tendency of many youth to follow popular fads and "use as directed" by cultural industries. To be sure, not all young people are "avant-garde innovators; many are incredibly conservative and keep a tight grip on habit and routine" (Fronas, 1995, p.2).

In many ways, cultural workers have unwittingly worked alongside the impresarios of popular culture by endorsing the transformative potential of buying things (Frank, 1997). Fiske (1989), for instance, partakes in an "unqualified celebration of popular culture [that is] blind to the power relations, the dialectic of domination and

subordination" (McGuigan, 1992, p.73). And while de Certeau is cognizant of subjugation, he overestimates acts of resistance. This is illustrated by his colorful aphorism used to explain the tactics of consumption: a consumer "makes the text habitable, like a rented apartment. It [consumption] transforms another person's property into a space borrowed for a moment by a transient" (de Certeau, 1984, pp.484, 491). Yet de Certeau's allegory is missing a fundamental character: the landlord, whom last month raised the rent and managed to avoid repairing the leaky faucet and the three holes in the drywall from the previous tenants. My point is that despite the way I personalize the apartment, it remains the property of another, thus subject to her/his quixotic discretion. By de Certeau's logic, any and all consumption is a potential act of resistance. Yet this only encourages the further "colonization of physical and mental space" by the Visigoths of corporate capitalism (Klein, 2000). In fact, corporations are less an eradicator of fun than its sponsor (Frank, 1997). As mentioned, *Vans Warped Tour* is sponsored by Target department stores; Miller beer was a major supporter of the Gay Games in 1994 (Miller, 2003); and Bud Light sponsored the San Francisco Folsom Street Fair, veritably dubbed "the world's largest leather event" (Miller, 2001, p.54). In the end, very little is transgressed through sponsored transgression.

Pleasure gained from subcultural practices, Wilson notes, "can be analytically distinct from resistance, subversion or transgression" (2003, p.405). In this sense, the act of skateboarding can be read as both dissident and insignificant. On the one hand, skateboarding in an urban zone designated off-limits to skaters is a potential act of political resistance. Skating at a skatepark, on the other hand, may be a forged and hollow resistance since the activity is sanctioned, even encouraged, by authority. This is what Wilson refers to as "trivial resistance" (2003). A differentiation between pleasure, resistance and coping has been noted elsewhere (cf. Dunbar, 2000; Dworkin & Messner, 1999). Dworkin and Messner (1999), for instance, distinguish between "resistant agency" and "reproductive agency" (Dunbar, 2000). Resistant agency refers to the empowerment of individuals and the capability to change oppressive social institutions, while reproductive agency provides little or no social change (Dworkin & Messner, 1999). While skaters may certainly express agency through creative consumption, the act of

consuming does little to change the inherent disparities of capitalist exploitation. As Dunbar (2000) explains, "reproductive agency merely offers consumers an image of resistance and/or rebellion with which they may identify" but is essentially sanitized of any gestures of dissent (p.270). As legitimate social movements devolve into consumable identities, consumption becomes an illusion of activism. Thus, "counterculture" is now peddled at the citadel of consumption: the ubiquitous shopping mall. Packaged in the commodity form, this so-called rebellion simply reifies capitalist power relations. Smoking dope and a hanging a poster of Che in one's bedroom, Frank (1997) notes, "is no more a commitment than drinking milk and collecting postage stamps. A revolution in consciousness is an empty high without a revolution in the distribution of power" (p.229). As will be shown, the rhetoric of rebellion conveyed through skateboarding is unambiguously reproductive insofar as it maintains, rather than upsets not only patriarchal relations, but also capitalist exploitation.

The metapolitical notion of resistance endorsed by early subcultural theorists retains little cultural currency. Simply because a scene or style is different "does not mean it exists in opposition to the mainstream" (Klein, 2000, p.82). Instead, transgressions are made subtle by individual acts of empowerment throughout everyday life (McRobbie, 1994; de Certeau, 1984; Wilson, 2003). More importantly, asserting agency and empowerment cannot be confused with political subversion in any traditional sense. As a result, resistance has been reworded over the years: "Youth cultures, in whatever shape they take, stake out an investment in society. It is in this sense they are political" (McRobbie, 1994, p.156). Whereas resistance has assumed new meanings in recent years, the concept of authenticity remains widely contested.

Authenticity, "Selling Out", and the Big Bad Media

Authenticity, by the Birmingham standard, existed outside the domains of commerce. Subcultural legitimacy was predicated on a series of binaries: authentic/imitation, true/phony, sincere/contrived. Accordingly, one could distinguish between the stylistic pacesetters that antedated commodification and their commercial followers. Yet such an argument neglects one paramount condition: subcultural styles are

often born into the marketplace. Indeed, "many of the stylistic innovators in punk had a firm stake in the commodity market themselves" (Willis, 1990, p.87). Theorists of subcultures complicate their studies when they imagine youth cultures to be entirely authentic and opposed to the corrupt, fabricated culture of the masses (Hall, 2001). Subcultural studies have traditionally espoused a "pastoral nostalgia" for a resistance antecedent of capitalist incorporation. Rinehart and Sydnor (2003) refer to this as the paradox of extreme sports: " 'Authentic', alternative, 'pure', avant-garde forms quickly become mainstream and 'corrupted'" (p.4). However, by recollecting a time of less commercialism, we are also taken back to an era of more profound white male dominance. Visualizing the death of a "pure" skateboarding era works to restore a sport hegemony that recenters white masculinity.[2] "This experience of the 'end' provokes intense and hyperbolic nostalgia and, among the soon-to-be-less-enfranchised, invokes images of 'the good old days' satisfied by television commercials, series, and mainstream movies that are archaic, pastoral, and idyllic in tone and location" (Sobchack, 1997, p.179). This is why we must avoid a romantic notion of cultural purity. Instead, it is more useful to explore the ways in which skaters themselves negotiate authenticity within their commercial culture.

For many so-called post-subcultural theorists, authenticity is now a wistful vestige of generations past (Redhead, 1997; Muggleton, 2000; Malbon, 1998). Since subcultures in the post-punk era are now born into the world of commerce, it is increasingly difficult to demarcate legitimate subculture from commercial copies (Redhead, 1997). As such, these theorists claim, "the concept of 'authenticity' must be expunged from the postmodern vocabulary" (Redhead, cited in Muggleton, 2000, p.45). While subcultures have certainly changed over the years, it seems theorists still cling to a more archaic notion of genuine culture, making it easier to relinquish in the postmodern era. However, as skaters and skate companies will attest, authenticity is of crucial importance for earning the trust of subcultural members (Beal & Weidman, 2003). Despite the claims of

[2] Abdel-Shehid (2000) has made a similar argument regarding hockey in Canada. As he suggests, "Representing hockey as dying produces a group of 'villains' who are said to be killing hockey" (2000, p.72). Essentially, romanticizing the golden age of hockey has the potential to be racially and sexually exclusive in Canada (Abdel-Shehid, 2000)

post-subcultural theorists, it is imperative to retheorize authenticity within the historical context of mass commercialization. And by rethinking subcultural legitimacy we are better positioned to understand the current connotations of selling-out and cooptation.

While several theorists imagine authenticity in a pedantic form, it seems their subcultural subjects do not. Alternative sports have been described as "anti-police, anti-ranger, anti-land management, and anti-authority…but [they are] not anti-money" (Fairfield, cited in Humphreys, 2003, p.417). A nostalgia for a resistant culture that somehow evades the corruption of capitalism is increasingly difficult to maintain since it disregards the critical negotiations skaters make to counteract the alleged "mainstreaming" of their culture. Selling out, as it were, has taken on various meanings over the years, forcing us to reimagine cooptation in skate cultures. By traditional standards, cooptation theory is essentially a "faith in the revolutionary potential of 'authentic' counterculture combined with the notion that business mimics and mass-produces fake counterculture in order to cash in on a particular demographic and to subvert the great threat that 'real' counterculture represents" (Frank, 1997, p.7). Yet the monolithic category of "business" has become as useless as "mass media". Both require articulation if we are to understand authenticity and cooptation in skateboard culture. From an economic reductionist perspective, selling out is the quintessential contradiction of skateboarding. Yet there is a serious discrepancy between academic ideas of authenticity and the skaters' own definitions (the former remains shackled in an outdated romantic notion of resistance). In the skate industry, "sponsored" skaters achieve a paramount status. As Ruml suggests, "Getting sponsored by Zephyr [skateshop] was like nirvana…If you were wearing a navy blue Zephyr shirt you were the shit" (Peralta, 2001). It is interesting to note, however, that Ruml is reminiscing about skating in the 1970s – an era often, and incorrectly, remembered as commercially pure (Miller, 2004). Commercialism, evidently, has been an important component in subcultural genesis, making it increasingly pointless to apply some fantasized notion of chaste authenticity to skateboarding.

More importantly, sponsorship became a method of extending one's subcultural career: it "was your ticket off the beach, and out of a life of destitution" (Peralta, 2001). Quite literally, many skaters are paid to have fun. Getting a skateboard sponsorship in the 1970s, Peralta notes, was equivalent to "Nike paying you $10, 000 to spray graffiti all over the city" (2001). In this way, youth have historically turned play into an alternative to the drudgery of workaday life (Kelley, 1997). As aging pro skater Steve Caballero mockingly suggest, "It's almost time for me to get my first job – at the age of 39" (Carnie, 2004, p.96). We may think of the term "playbor" to describe the process of being employed to engage in leisure activities. However, playbor does not necessarily suggest a blissful co-existence between skaters and their sponsors. On the contrary, skaters are now in the process of unionizing to attain health insurance and less-tenuous contracts (Carnie, 2004). While this is certainly a relationship of wage labor, it also illustrates the resiliency of skate culture. Rather than disband at the onset of commodification, skaters have found ways to benefit. As the mother of a pre-teen skater explains, "When Quicksilver [clothing company] came to me and said, 'Can we sponsor [your son's] clothing?' I had to laugh. I was like: 'Hey, I'm a single mother. You can dress him until he's eighteen'" (Talbot, 2003, p.D3). And while this may seem like commercial incorporation, there is one crucial factor when considering skate subculture: many skate companies are, in fact, owned and operated by skaters themselves.

As smaller skate companies lost their sponsored riders to larger corporations, cooptation became an increasing concern as early as the 1970s. Jeff Ho (owner of the Zephyr skateshop) explains, "As these other companies decided they needed one of your guys on their team, so they went after all your guys; Zephyr shop didn't have money to compete with larger sponsors" (Peralta, 2001). Whereas larger corporations provide lucrative deals to young skaters, the pleasure of skating can easily turn to indentured labor. Large sponsors often "make you sign contracts when you're a minor, tell you what to do, where to be, and how to act" (Peralta, 2001). As a result, many skaters in the 1970s shunned sponsorship and formed their own skate companies. Skate legend Tony Alva, for instance, was 19 years old when he opened his first skate company. Rather than make corporations large amounts of money, Alva avoided exploitation by producing his own

brand of skateboards (Peralta, 2001; Borden, 2001). Indeed, what often separates alternative sports from traditional team sports is the degree to which athletes "have become intertwined with the industry…itself" (Rinehart, 2003, p.31). The list of skater-owned-and-operated companies is exhaustive: Blind (owned by ex-freestyler Rodney Mullen), Fallen and Zero (owned by pro skater Jamie Thomas), Birdhouse (owned by Tony Hawk). Ownership, evidently, is a pillar of authenticity in skateboarding. This forces us to rethink traditional notions of commercial incorporation.

Although the development of skateboarding has certainly benefited from capitalist production, this does not signal the end of cooptation. Instead, skaters have reworked their own ideas of authenticity in the industry. For our purposes here, Van Elteren's (1999) notion of authenticity is particularly germane. It connotes "that which is true, consistent, sincere, or real as opposed to the imitative, artificial, contrived, or phony" (p.95). Such an explanation, by my reading, allows room for conditional commercialism. Whereas any corporate encroachment in a subculture was once theorized as taboo, youth now negotiate the legitimacy of companies. Authenticity, converted to sales, is reserved for those companies that are able to demonstrate "core" values of skateboarding that might include an historical relationship with the sport, or admired sponsored skaters. While skater-owned companies like Fallen, Circa, and Blind accumulate significant subcultural capital, companies not historically involved in skating, such as Nike, are heavily scrutinized in skate culture. Cooptation, then, occurs when corporations with tangential ties to skateboarding sponsor core riders. Such is the case with skateboarding pioneer Steve Caballero. The skater now endorses a product called "Skatewave", which manufactures plastic, moveable ramps. Caballero has been criticized for supporting a company that not only produces a dubious product, but also "steals" skatepark contracts from the more skater-approved "Dreamland" (Carnie, 2004). While the old theories of cooptation – predicated on pre-capitalist purity – are now outdated, the same may also be true of theories of media incorporation.

Several early researchers lamented the defusion of subcultural insurgency at the hands of media. The classic theories, Thornton (1996) rightly observes, "tended to banish

media and commerce from their definitions of authentic culture…The authors position the media in opposition to and after the fact of subculture" (p.9). In this sense, mass media is a perpetual disarming mechanism rather than a catalyst of subcultural formation. Taking inventory of the recent proliferation of all media forms, it is more likely that "there was never a privileged moment of 'authentic' subcultural inception untainted by media…influences" (Muggleton, 1997, p.195). Thus, it is now more useful to discuss the constructive roles of media. Moreover, a monolithic media has been disassembled into more pragmatic forms. Thornton (1996), for example, works with several categories of media including popular, alternative, and underground. Each media type plays an important role as a clearinghouse of messages and ideology (McRobbie, 2000). Thornton's work helps us differentiate between media forms *with* subcultural legitimacy and those forms *without*. As a result, "cooptation is something much more complex than the struggle back and forth between capital and youth revolution" (Frank, 1997, p.235). Following these theorists, I explain how media helps create the culture of skateboarding. The next section will identify such processes. Rather than seek out acts of resistance and incorporation, I find it more useful to build upon recent studies of subcultural media and explore: 1. The extent to which skate culture is created by media exposure; and 2. The ways in which skaters and skating are represented in both popular and alternative media.

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Chapter 2 – Media and the Creation of Boarding Culture

During the1980s the sport of skateboarding made sporadic appearances in popular and alternative media. Skaters were represented most consistently by only two mass circulated publications – *Thrasher* and *TransWorld*. They also managed to make a tenuous entrance into popular cinema with films like *Thrashin'* (1986) and *Gleaming the Cube* (1989). Within the past few years, however, the number of skateboarding magazines has soared. Added to the few is now *Big Brother*, *Concrete Wave*, *Document*, *Adrenalin*, *Bail*, *Heckler*, and in Canada, *SBC Skateboarder* and *Concrete Powder*. What is more, skaters nowadays occupy a fixed place in televised media. Whereas in the 1980s skaters made cameo appearances in soft-drink commercials and B-movies, today there is a nonstop dosage of them on television.[1] The increasing popularity of ESPN's *X-Games*, NBC's *Gravity Games*, and *Tony Hawk's Gigantic Skatepark Tour* has given the sport surging commercial exposure like never before. As a result, the skateboarding industry has experienced a tumult of changes, making it increasingly necessary to explore the ways in which media both create and alter subcultures.

Despite the rhetoric of resistance and authenticity, Thornton (1996) notes, subcultures "do not germinate from a seed and grow by force of their own energy into mysterious 'movements' only to be belatedly digested by the media" (p.117). As several researchers have suggested, subcultures are well-nigh unimaginable without the forces of media exposure (Van Elteren, 1999; Thornton, 1996; Muggleton, 1997). Indeed, subcultures are "not unmediated formations, nor are they autonomous grassroots cultures which only meet the media when they are in the process of 'selling out'" (Van Elteren, 1999, p.81). Although media forms do not "impose singular meanings on the multitude" they are, nevertheless, regarded as a constructive agent in creating identities (Brantlinger, 1990, p.127). It is in this sense that subcultures cannot be studied without looking at media.

[1] Members of the Bones Brigade skateboard team appeared as extras in Jim Drake's *Police Academy 4: Citizens on Patrol* (1987).

In an innovative contribution to the study of youth, McRobbie (2000) explains the role of *Jackie* magazine in creating cultures of consumption for young women. Essentially, she "mounts a systematic critique of *Jackie* as a system of messages, a signifying system and a bearer of a certain ideology, an ideology which deals with the construction of teenage femininity" (McRobbie, 2000, p.67). McRobbie (2000) has also reevaluated S. Cohen's (1972) Moral Panic theory. Instead of presenting a threat to subculture, negative mass media coverage may actually validate the group's rebellious countenance. Moral panic, in this manner, may be read as a "priceless PR campaign" that actually "constructs what the subculture becomes as much as the kids on the street" (McRobbie, 2000, p.187, 33). What is more, the current "time/space compression" (accompanying the proliferation of media forms) means that subcultural styles are actually born into media; there is no longer a period between subcultural creation and media cooptation (Muggleton, 2000).[3] While McRobbie first discussed the creative elements of commercial media back in the 1980s, other theorists have only recently used her arguments.

Current subcultural studies are attentive to the proactive role of media since it creates "a network crucial to the definition and distribution of cultural knowledge" (Thornton, 1997, p.203). Thornton, for instance, sorts media into more tangible elements. In a study of British rave culture, she distinguishes between mass, niche, and micro media. All of these forms – television (mass), special-interest magazines (niche), and underground fanzines (micro) – "create subcultures in the process of naming them and draw boundaries around them in the act of describing them" (Thornton, cited in Muggleton, 2000, p.136). The various types of media are notably different in terms of publication process, audiences, and circulation (Thornton, 1996). Although niche and micro media can legitimate subcultural trends, mass coverage can signal the "kiss of death" for fringe movements (Thornton, 1996, p.122). As the spectrum of media types expands, one may find several different interpretations of subcultures. Certain media forms have veritable subcultural credibility while others do not. On the one hand,

[3] "As space appears to shrink to a 'global village' of telecommunications…and as time horizons shorten to the point where the present is all there is (the world of the schizophrenic), so we have to learn how to cope with an overwhelming sense of compression of our spatial and temporal worlds" (Harvey, 1989, p.240).

underground fanzines and niche-market videos may present a convincing version of a subculture. On the other hand, mass-circulated publications or televised exposés may only present caricatures of that culture. As Hebdige (1979) once noted, subcultural members both agree and disagree with elements of their popular representation. Subcultures repeatedly picture themselves in a "mass-mediated mirror, then change and alter its forms to both correspond to and resist those images" (Borchard, 1999, p.9). Essentially, subcultural members negotiate an identity that is somewhat of a simulacrum between popular and alternative depictions. Whereas Thornton researches rave cultures, the same logic is equally true of other subcultures.

It is suggested, for instance, that Pete Townshend's rock-opera *Quadrophenia* (1973) inspired a resurgent interest in mod culture of '60s Britain (Hebdige, 1976). Likewise, Frank (1997) boldly asserts that popular media, in particular advertising of the 1960s, helped develop countercultural rhetoric. The primary objective of marketing during this period, he suggests, "was not to encourage conformity but a never-ending rebellion against whatever it is that everyone else is doing, a forced and exaggerated individualism" (1997, p.90). Frank argues, in particular, that "Pepsi's fictional liberated generation, sketched out in national magazines and television commercials as early as 1961, anticipated the actual youth movement of the 1960s" (p.173). This cozy relationship between the media, subcultures, and commodities is also documented by Ewen and Ewen (1992): "In James Dean's *Rebel without a Cause*, or Marlon Brando's *Wild One*, dungarees provided a channel of contempt toward the empty and conformist quietude of cold-war suburbia, and for the 'rural idiocy of small-town life" (p.78). Taking these studies into consideration, we may ask, In what ways has the culture of skateboarding been facilitated and fabricated by popular and alternative media?

Images of alternative or so-called extreme sports can be found almost anywhere in everyday life. Skaters appear in videogames, music videos and advertisements for soft-drinks, fast food, and even mobile phones. Alternative sports have even penetrated the postal market: "in the summer of 1999, US Postal Service issued 150 million stamps featuring extreme sports" (Rinehart & Sydnor, 2003, p.1). Also, it has been estimated that

over 10, 000 (English) Internet sites feature action sports (Rinehart & Sydnor, 2003). Such a ubiquitous media presence is sure to have important consequences for both the construction and maintenance of boarding cultures. And while a kaleidoscope of representations exist, this study is primarily concerned with those offered by alternative media. As skaters are notoriously opposed to mainstream press (those forms not exclusively devoted to skateboarding), underground or alternative coverage may provide a more accurate (read: authentic) depiction of skate culture. Thus, alternative skate media functions as a window into the culture of the core members.

Media has been an important feature of skateboarding ever since its popular inception in the 1970s. In Stacy Peralta's film, *Dog Town and Z-Boys* (2001), writer/photographer Craig Stecyk is repeatedly recognized as the progenitor of early skate culture. His "words and photos became the template of the attitude and aesthetic that would come to define the culture of modern day skateboarding" (Peralta, 2001). Stecyk's work as both photographer and writer encapsulated not only the velocity of the stunt performed, but also the lifestyle and the code of skateboarding (Peralta, 2001). The importance of Stecyk and other photographers of early skate culture cannot be overstated. As Ruml suggests, "Without Stecyk, skateboarding could have just as easily become Little League baseball. It would have just become another novelty, but the way he presented it, wrote about it…really brought [the sport] to another level; he gave it a new significance" (Peralta, 2001). This suggests that media are instrumental in not only popularizing subcultures, but also defining the movement itself. While skate media of the 1970s certainly aided in the development and popularity of the sport, a watershed of media forms has increased representations of skate culture in recent years.

The culture of skateboarding is certainly not impervious to the forces of capitalist production. This is particularly true of its media forms. Arguably the most popular skateboard magazine, *TransWorld*, is now owned by AOL Time Warner's Times Mirror Magazines (Fitzgerald, 2001). Another popular magazine, *Big Brother*, is published under the auspices of Larry Flynt's corporation. And, of course, the impresario of *X-Games*, ESPN, is currently owned by Disney. Yet many media forms remain under the

control of independent skate companies. As a result, the media representations of skaters are myriad. Following Thornton, there are several types of skateboarding media. Popular expressions of skateboarding appear in *X-Games* and *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* videogames; niche-market media include *TransWorld*, *Thrasher*, and Skateboarding.com; and micro media is comprised of independent skate films and e-zines. Just as Thornton discovered various levels of credibility for different media forms, the same is true of skateboarding.

Larger media spectacles such as *X-Games* and *Gravity Games* are explicitly devoted to televising what many consider to be a dying element of skateboarding: vertical riding (Carnie, 2004). This is because "half-pipe" competitions involve high-flying stunts that attract a larger television audience. As Mortimer (2004) notes, "Mainstream media portrays vert skating as what skateboarding is all about, while skateboarding magazines portray it as a sort of side-show" (p.115). In this sense, different media forms (popular v. alternative, televised v. print) capture and create different skate paradigms by focusing on different aspects of the sport. Skating's popular ambassador Tony Hawk describes the process of recruitment via media: "It seems like vert skating helps attract kids into skateboarding through ESPN and videogames, but after they start reading the magazines they switch to street skating" (Mortimer, 2004, p.116). Hawk's remarks indicate that media exposure generates interest in skating, which invariably changes the culture both economically and aesthetically. Despite the differences in production and audience-size, skate media all share one common feature: they encourage commodity consumption as a gateway to subcultural membership.

As skateboarding becomes spectacularized entire sport audiences are "re-educated" by carefully choreographed media images (Rinehart & Sydnor, 2003). In the twenty-first century, Kellner (2003) argues, " media culture is more important than ever in serving as a force of socialization, providing models of masculinity and femininity, socially approved and disapproved behavior, style and fashion, and appropriate role models" (p.viii). Popular and alternative skate media, then, act as consumptive guides teaching aspiring subculturalists about the style, gear, music, and even the hip argot of

skateboarding. Media "chronicles what I should buy, what I should wear, where I should go, what I should see, and what mass-culture offering I should choose from" (White, 1997, p.63). As Giroux (2000) notes, "Social identities are shaped almost exclusively within the ideology of consumerism" (p.68). "Lifestyle sport" becomes an increasingly appropriate label insofar as mass-marketing often associates a product (Sprite) with a musical genre (punk/hip-hop) and a subculture (skateboarding) (Borchard, 1999). The effect, Faurschou (1990) suggests, "is that the consumer must acquire not just one object, but a system of objects which must be consumed as a system, as a complete collection" (p.247). To illustrate, Tony Hawk's recent skateboard project the *Boom Boom Huck Jam Tour*, features skaters, BMXers, and motocross freestylists performing alongside music groups The Offspring, Social Distortion, Face to Face, as well as the familiar insignia of Tony's sponsors including Activision, Playstation 2, MTV, and Squeeze 'n' Go Portable Pudding. Tony's videogames are also illustrative of cross-marketing. "The games are a tremendous selling device, for an obvious reason: if *Pro Skater* is your game, what else would you wear, in these intensely branded times, but skate clothes" (Quart, 2003, p.137)?[4] Howe (2003) captures this inherent link between media, alternative sport, and commodity consumption:

> The movie "Fast Times at Ridgemont High" became a sleeper hit of 1982. In the Movie, a skateboarding Jeff Spicoli (played by a young Sean Penn) beats himself over the head with a readily identifiable Vans shoe to test the potency of his marijuana. Both are righteous, and Spicoli – the incidental rebel, the unassuming libertine who has a double cheese and sausage pizza delivered to his US history class – becomes, however briefly, a paragon of cool. So did his shoes; Vans tracks the blossoming throughout the land, becoming de rigeur footwear for anyone else channeling Spicoli's particular brand of rebellion through difference (p.353).

[4] As Quart points out, "video gaming did $9.4 billion worth of business in 2001" (p.127).

Certainly mediated communications have contributed to the current, and contradictory, subcultural status of skateboarding. While the pages of skate magazines are filled with images of daring stunts and sometimes-satirical interviews, they are also packed with advertisements from major corporate players in the industry. Following McRobbie (2000), then, subcultural style is at once born into the media *and* the cash-commodity nexus. As one subscriber to the skate magazine *Concrete Wave* admits, "Most of my exposure to new products comes from ads" (p.25). Media not only teach subcultural members about cool brands, they also "baptize scenes and generate the self-consciousness required to maintain cultural distinctions" (Thornton, 1996, p.151). Using e-zines and other indie media, skaters are able to gain tips and information about local skate areas. In this way, media distributes a veritable circuitry of "hot spots". Although skate media teaches aspiring skaters about appropriate consumption, it also facilitates creative expression within the culture. Videography, for example, is a method of cultural production that can be produced entirely by a DiY ("do it yourself") ethic.

It has often been suggested that video footage provides skaters with an advanced form of cultural expression (Stricker, 2004). Not only is stunting a creative idiom, but capturing those tricks on film is itself material production of skate culture. In one sense, media cooptation is increasingly difficult to theorize since skaters perpetually recreate their own interpretations of both the culture and the stunts via the "Hi8" camcorder. To be sure, each "session" is unique and often defies replication. The camcorder functions much like the photocopier of punk and rave fanzines whereby independent production is a way to control subcultural information, as well as mobilize creative expression within skate culture. On the one hand, "demo" tapes may function as, what Scott (1990) calls, "hidden transcripts". To counteract the representation of themselves in popular media (an artifact of public transcripts) skaters may produce a hidden discourse of performance – captured on film – that represents a "critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant" (Scott, 1990, p.xii). On the other hand, these "sponsor-me-tapes", as they are often called, are a means by which amateur skaters solicit skate companies in the hopes of attaining sponsorship.

Whereas media was once thought to extinguish a fringe movement, today it helps authenticate the subculturalist. An appearance in a skate video "is finally where you get to let people know exactly why, and for what reason, you have anything [sponsorship and endorsements]" (Song, cited in Stricker, 2004, p.159). This suggests that alternative media in skate culture is a valuable authenticator of skaters and distributor of stunts, fashion, and style. In fact, video appearances buttress the careers of professional skaters since they prove to the skate community the worth of sponsored riders (Stricker, 2004). In addition, the use of "insider" or alternative media is a means by which skaters exhibit "subcultural capital". Demonstrating familiarity with the riders and knowledge of stunts performed in esoteric videos is a method of conferring status within the culture (Thornton, 1996). As such, skaters are quick to criticize caricatures of skating in mass media. Nevertheless, popular media shape what skate cultures become as much as alternative depictions.

As skateboarding reaches unprecedented levels of popularity, it receives media exposure from all popular forms. Thus, companies with little investment (save economics) in skate culture often create images of the sport. Some companies have added to the subversive depiction of skating, if only for pecuniary benefit. Nike, for instance, launched its 1999 ad-campaign titled, "What if all athletes were treated like skateboarders?" in support of their inaugural skateboard sneaker. The series of commercials featured a golfer, for instance, chased off the green by a police officer. It seems Nike tapped into the zeitgeist of youth culture by parodying the "urban pathology" of skateboarding (Howell, 2003). Other corporations, however, have not been as fortunate.

Although Pepsi Co. may have created a youth movement in 1961 with the epithet "Pepsi Generation", its imagery of revolution soon expired (Frank, 1997). "Overnight, those tanned, frolic-some, happy-go-lucky people of the Pepsi generation began to become advertising anachronisms. They became square to the very people" they were aimed at (Frank, 1997, p.177). This means popular media forms can easily distort subcultures in their quest for profit. Years later, Pepsi would once again bastardize a

youth culture. In a particular advert for "Generation Next" Pepsi "portrayed a bunch of 'cool' snowboarders, who acted really goofy and used completely moronic slang…The reality is, snowboarders consider themselves serious alternative athletes, not clowns" (Pappas, 2002, p.16). Similarly, a recent TV commercial for Wrigley's Juicy Fruit gum depicts an angry group of snowboarders destroying the guitar of a folksinger/skier crooning at a ski lodge. Yet the youthful insurgent is holding a snowboard several sizes too short for his height. These inconsistencies may be irrelevant, however, since they are not intended to reach the boarding consumer; "Madison Avenue's vision of the counterculture was notoriously unconvincing to many who actually took part in the movement – and for a very simple reason: they were not necessarily the primary target of such campaigns" (Frank, 1997, p.120).

In many ways, identity politics provided corporate capitalism with the profitable vocabulary of "revolution" (Klein, 2000). Difference, Gilroy (2000) suggests, functions as a spectacle and "a powerful marketing device in the global business of selling records, tapes, CDs, videos, and associated merchandise" (p.132). The novelty of a commodity, conferred by its association with board sports, makes all those previously consumed products increasingly obsolete. As the incarnate of hip resistance and youthful vitality, skateboarding lends an air of revolution to each product it is used to endorse. The threatening features of the real Other – whether it be youth, blacks, or both – is pacified by its circulation and regulation in the cash nexus (Zizek, 1997). Thus, in the marketplace, a discourse of black liberation politics is gladly replaced with gun-toting, pimpin' thugs. This is not to suggest that rap culture poses no threat to white normativity. Indeed, waves of moral panics staged by the conservative right validate rap's menacing fantasy. Yet a gangsta on the mic sells records to a lucrative demographic of affluent white youth. As an aesthetic style, gangsta culture is more readily absorbed into white society than a more articulated discourse of black liberation politics that challenges racism as it operates in capitalist labor processes. As Gilroy points out, "the culture industry is prepared to make substantial investments in blackness provided that it yields a user-friendly, house-trained, and marketable" version (2000, p.242). Nowehere is this more evident than in the realm of advertising. Last year, Right Guard deodorant seemed

much "cooler" than Old Spice since its commercials featured rap artists Method Man and Red Man. That coolness oscillates between various companies is indicative of its infidelity. To realign itself with youth and cool, Old Spice has recently adopted skate imagery to peddle deodorant. As Brooks (2003) explains, "Youth and youthfulness are transformed into another form of mass consumption, and the notion of rebellion and opposition to the mainstream into a fad: one that is forever 'functional, fashionable, and fun' for people of all ages" (p.4). The appropriation of skate iconography by mainstream companies often contributes to a caricaturing of skateboard culture. As one skater warns, "Look closely at [multinationals'] interpretation of skateboarding. It is wrong. It is untrue to the culture" (Bazorda, 2004, p.75).

Yet accurate representations are, in some ways, irrelevant since the target audience of Old Spice and Right Guard are not necessarily skaters and rappers. This would explain the fictional spokesmodel and the use of a skater-stunt-double in the Old Spice advert. After all, no real skater is preoccupied with pleasurable fragrances in the midst of performing a crooked grind or a frontside 180 flip. In this sense, "corporate interests are served by selling back to the predominantly adult market images of youth that confirm the stereotypes disseminated and maintained by a hegemonic cultural pedagogy" (Brooks, 2003, p.3). Such parodies of a subculture make it easy for those "core" riders to discriminate between media forms. It bears repeating Hebdige's claim that subcultural members both acknowledge and refuse the representations of their own culture in popular forms.

Types of media have certainly burgeoned since the years of early subcultural work. Most notably, the Internet and videogames are now increasingly important mediums of not only information, but also ideology. To be sure, "the electronic media – television, movies, music, and news – have become powerful pedagogical forces, veritable teaching machines in shaping the social imagination of students in terms of how they view themselves, others, and the larger society" (Giroux, 1997, p.109). This is particularly true of subcultures, forcing us to retheorize the role of media in cultural creation. Essentially, the omnipresence of media ensures that we can no longer privilege

and romanticize a subculture autonomous from mediated communications (Muggleton, 1997). As Kellner (2003) articulates, "A media culture has emerged in which images, sounds, and spectacles help produce the fabric of everyday life, dominating leisure time, shaping political views and social behavior, and providing the materials out of which people forge their very identities" (p.1). Having acknowledged the constructive role of media in skate culture, it becomes increasingly important to examine the ways in which skaters are represented.

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Chapter 3 – Road Rash and "Blacklash":
Skateboarding and the Masculine Flight from Middle-Class Whiteness

Media texts, it is argued, function as a form of myth whereby they work to resolve social contradictions (Barthes, 1972). In resolving contradictions, popular media often construct a version of reality that supports the dominant social order, or what hooks (1992) refers to as the "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy". If we are to understand the representations and ideological constructions of board culture, it is necessary to situate the discourse – both popular and alternative – within the current socio-economic climate of identity politics. To do so requires grappling with a series of arguments that ultimately invalidate white male dissent by fixing it within the politics of the conservative right. That is, the archetypical "angry white male" has been exclusively coupled with white male backlash politics. This speaks to the current "crises" of being a heterosexual white man in contemporary North American culture.

Shifting gender and race relations have, in small increments, disrupted the unmentioned privileges of white males from the time of the civil rights movements to present. This has resulted in a vociferous group of angry white males appropriating a marginal status in hopes of rescuing their own social advantage from the "ravages" of affirmative action policies. Abject white masculinity "served as an effective means of configuring people of color (and, to a lesser extent, white women) as an oppressive group and angry white men as a group who would, and should revolt" (Rasmussen, Klinenberg, Nexica, & Wray, 2001, p.67). Essentially, representations of marginalized white men are said to illustrate a conservative zeitgeist of backlash politics (Newitz & Wray, 1997). These insecurities of whiteness and masculinity are reflected and articulated through popular culture (Whannel, 2002). They have also been uttered through the spectacle of sport.

Sport has historically been a field in which competing masculinities and racial stereotypes have been contested as well as (erroneously) corroborated (Messner & Sabo, 1990; Dworkin & Messner, 1999). The waxing momentum of "athletic affirmative

action", for instance, illustrates the extent to which white male backlash politics are germinated through sport. Indeed, the trope of victimization has been radically inverted in recent years. As former US Presidential candidate Bill Bradley explains, a racial quota for athletics – most notably basketball – "recognizes that there are physical barriers to athletic success for many Americans simply because of their race [read: whiteness]…Non-African-Americans do not want special treatment. But they do want the same athletic opportunity African Americans have" ("Bill Bradley Calls for Affirmative Action for White Athletes", 1999, par.3, 5). A bevy of backlash texts, such as Entine's *Taboo: Why Black Athletes Dominate Sport and Why We're Afraid to Talk About it* (2000) have curried an increasing anxiety of racial inferiority in athletics. Sporting narratives of white abjectivity, as Kusz (2001) suggests, portray black male athletes as a "dominant, discriminating, and exclusionary force whose success unfairly constrains the life possibilities of white male youths by forcing them to abandon their dreams of being a professional athlete" (p.408). This logic has been applied to alternative sports whereby marginalized representations obfuscate white normativity. That is, subcultural imagery invokes a version of victimization that is often incongruous to the general privileges enjoyed by white men (Kusz, 2001; 2003). An activity like skateboarding, by this logic, can be read as an attempt to restore white male power in sport. Yet there is another side to the angry white male narrative that often goes unmentioned in both critical race studies and scholarly work on alternative sports: the rebel male who refuses his own whiteness.

Renegade white masculinity – a somewhat liberal response to the angry white male – is historically rooted in countercultural narratives: Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) and Norman Mailer's *White Negro* (1957). While this white rebellion predates civil rights movements, and thus the typical "angry white male", it provided a master narrative for white dissent in the late 1960s, most exemplified by Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider* (1969). These texts of white male rebellion exemplify a homosocial escape from "conformist" culture and a disavowal of middle-class whiteness. Such a refusal of "whiteness" (read: suburban, middle-class banality) represents a markedly different expression of the angry white male. And if sport reflects the anxieties of white men, could it also articulate this resistant strand of white masculinity?

Sport is a site through which a series of masculinities and racial narratives get played out in popular culture (Kusz, 2003; Whannel, 2002). As such, this paper explores representations of renegade white masculinity through an analysis of skateboard media. While some sport texts are symptomatic of a white male backlash others, I argue, foster a sustained critique of whiteness. The discourse of skateboarding, for instance, represents a physical and sartorial escape from a fantasized model of middle-class whiteness. In this sense, skate media expresses a renegade white masculinity not unlike that of countercultural narratives. Historicizing alternative sport alongside these earlier texts may provide a timely tempering of white male backlash not only within critical race theory, but also the interdiscipline of race and sport. Essentially, this paper exposes the limitations of an unconditional critique of backlash politics. Although renegade white masculinity may represent a strikingly different expression of the angry white male, we should avoid celebrating such resistance. As will be shown, texts of white male rebellion often introduce new complications concerning gender representation and romanticization of the subaltern.

Poor White Guys, Backlash Politics, and Sport

The first task of this paper is to briefly outline the politics of white male backlash and how they are expressed through sport. To start, several important social factors contribute to this conservative reaction. As feminist and multiculturalist movements disputed the tacit social advantages of white men, a new form of masculinity took shape in the 1970s (Kimmel, 1996; Savran, 1998). Seeing their privileges threatened by the successive waves of feminism and the "limited success of civil rights movements", some white men came to adopt a position of self-proclaimed marginalization (Savran, 1998). Winant (1994) has referred to this as the "imaginary white disadvantage", for which there is little or no supportive evidence. Affirmative action policies, conservative critics argue, largely function as a form of "reverse discrimination" in contemporary North America (Wellman, 1997). Multiculturalism, then, leads to an erosion of "traditional" values that implicitly privileged white men. Such arguments also suggest that policies designed to implement equal opportunity in the workplace, educational settings and other social

institutions have grown outdated, and now serve to discriminate against white men. By this logic, affirmative action strategies are "counterproductive" and "un-American" (Wellman, 1997, p.318). Evidently, such "unjust" legislation has created a formidable character in US culture – the angry white man (Savran, 1998). Somehow victimized by affirmative action, this individual uses a position of disadvantage to reclaim the unspoken benefits of being white and male. This appropriation of a subaltern status by white men is referred to as "margin poaching" (Hill, 1997) and "identity politics of the dominant" (Robinson, 2000). Symptoms of which can be located in popular narratives, making it possible to "map the ways in which dominant powers maintain their grip despite the proliferation of cultural difference" (Mackeye, 2002, p.5). In some ways, then, a marginalized status works to recenter white masculinity in different social texts.

Popular and alternative media not only provide us with a series of cultural leitmotifs but they also supply, in part, the tools through which we evaluate our social surroundings (Giroux, 2000; Kellner, 1995, 2003). As Whannel (2002) suggests, "Forms of popular culture are revealing sites in which to examine the unstable attempts to deal with crisis" (p.8). Thus, a wide array of popular films, music, and literature can be read alongside a reactionary politics. The meteoric rise of "men's magazines" in recent years certainly signals an attempt by some white men to invigorate a new expression of masculine dominance. Magazines such as *Maxim*, *FHM*, *Loaded*, *Stuff*, and *Tongue* illustrate a resurgence of "sexism and misogyny, and a new acceptability of sexualized imagery, with the attempted justification of being cloaked in postmodern irony" (Whannel, 2002, p.7). What is more, male viewers in North America are now outfitted with an entire television network that promises "deliverance from women" (Kimmel, 1996, p.263).

In June of 2003, the impresarios at MTV launched the Spike network into 86 million American homes ("TNN Rebrands Itself Spike TV", 2003). Spike TV is an unabashed revival of chest-thumping masculinity. Ironically, it dubs itself "the first network for men" (as if television was saturated with femininity) and showcases the retro-machismo of programs like *American Gladiators* (a late '80s interpretation of

Roman pugilists) and Stan Lee's smarmy cartoon *Stripperella* (an action-heroine/exotic-dancer based on the oeuvre of Pamela Anderson). By gearing its content toward (white) men, Spike represents an attempted revival of pre-1990s masculinity that does more to parody identity politics than reflect it. Amusingly, the network features what is perhaps the most revealing white backlash sport under the saturnalia of postmodernity – *SlamBall* – an entertainment sport derived from basketball in which "white men *can* jump"... through the use of courtside trampolines. Visually, SlamBall is a "blank parody" of Norman Jewison's *Rollerball* (1975), only now underprivileged white men can finally dunk. This is but one episode of white abjectivity in sport.

Sport is a rather popular site for the articulation of racial anxieties (Dunbar, 2000). The racialized link between African America men and basketball, for instance, has become "the matter of popular visual narratives, converted by Hollywood and Madison Avenue to countless movie tie-ins and ad campaigns" (Brown, 1997, p.103). During a Presidential campaign tour in 1999 Democratic candidate Bill Bradley reflected upon athletic disadvantage during his years in the NBA. Visiting a school in an affluent white suburb of New York, Bradley discussed what he called "obvious physical discrimination" ("Bill Bradley Calls for Affirmative Action for White Athletes", 1999, par.1). He proposed an "athletic affirmative action" policy that would invoke racial quotas for collegiate athletics teams. Followers of Bradley's logic are not difficult to find. One white male – a second-year law student in Texas – appropriates the rhetoric of identity politics: "The time has come for affirmative action in college and professional basketball. We must stand up for our right to equal success and opportunity. For too long, public money has been used to subsidize a sport that lifts one ethnic group, while leaving the rest of us out in the cold" (Williams, 2000, par.16). Such diatribes often ignore the overwhelming number of white men who own professional sport franchises (Boyd, 1997; Johnson & Roediger, 1997). According to some theorists, a perceived racial inferiority in traditional team sports like basketball and football has created an increasingly profitable niche for "alternative" or "extreme" sports (Kusz, 2003).

The adoption of alternative sports (including BMX, freeskiing, snowboarding, and skateboarding) by popular media is commonly slated during the 1990s (Rinehart & Sydnor, 2003). During this time, the social climate of US culture was defined by "increasing racial anxieties between whites and blacks which was organized, at least in part, by the logic of identity politics" (Kusz, 2003, p.161). As such, this period marks a distinct era in which white men, in particular, expressed themselves as culturally different, and simultaneously marginalized (Kusz, 2003). This trend of social distinction is epitomized by alternative sports, often depicted as subcultures in both popular media and scholarly work. The subcultural representation of alternative sports signified "a socially marginal activity practiced by youths (frequently white and male) who espoused anti-establishment values that set it in opposition to middle-class norms and values" often dictated through traditional team sport (Kusz, 2003, p.163). In this sense, the angry white male of the conservative right – angst-ridden by his rejection from "racially-saturated" sports – found a cozy abode in the world of extreme. Skateboarding, for example, represents a site in which white males may be empowered yet maintain a guise of subversivity and marginalization. Some alternative sports can be linked to "a reactionary politics of representation which seeks to represent a strong, proud, confident, unconstrained, and unapologetic white athletic masculinity whose characteristics, investments, desires, and practices would appeal to white males" (Kusz, 2003, p.155). If my reading of Kusz (2001; 2003) is correct, alternative sports symbolize a "re-territorialization" of white athleticism through an expression of cultural diversity and misguided claims of marginality. Following this logic, alternative athletes have more in common with a conservative demagogue like Rush Limbaugh than with James Dean ("the bad boy from the good family"). There are certainly various expressions of whiteness, yet not all of them reinscribe their own racial privilege.

Calling whiteness into question is undeniably productive. Discussions of white male backlash in popular culture have been active in disassembling the often unspoken privileges of being white. Yet there is also a trend to unconditionally discount representations of white marginality. An overbearing attachment to the backlash criticism produces a tendency to dismiss any and all narratives of white male resistance as not only

fatally flawed, but also symptomatic of conservative politics. Other critics have rightly observed that not all white males are the recipients of social advantage (Wray & Newitz, 1997; Newitz & Wray, 1997; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2000). This creates space for another expression of the angry white male that merits consideration when studying an alternative sport like skateboarding: the white male dissident. In this chapter I set out to explain a markedly different expression of the angry white male. A renegade white masculinity is articulated in popular culture through countercultural narratives provided by Kerouac, Mailer, and more recently, the culture of skateboarding. The protagonists of these texts have long been a part of popular culture and cannot easily be reduced to a backlash politics. Instead, these narratives can be read as an escape from their own normativity and privilege. It may be that placing skateboarding within the politics of white male backlash is both misguided and debilitating to a liberal assessment of youth culture.

Popular Narratives of Renegade White Masculinity

Rather than conceive of masculinity as some monolithic category of manliness, it is more useful to recognize a series of masculinities (Whannel, 2002; Berger, Wallis, & Watson, 1995). Moreover, we should think of myriad expressions of masculinity each competing for hegemony (Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998). It is for this reason problematic to locate all narratives of white male marginality within backlash politics. Quite simply, not all men respond to immanent crises of masculinity and whiteness in a similar manner. Instead, several reactions take place during a particular era. Kimmel (1990) explains:

> Men's responses to the turn-of-the-century crisis of masculinity varied tremendously, especially given the simultaneity of the forces that seemed to be affecting middle-class white men. Some (comprising the anti-feminist response) gave vent to an angry backlash against the forces that were perceived as threatening men, whereas others (comprising the profeminist response) embraced feminist principles as the ground for a reconstitution of a

> new masculinity. A third response sought to revitalize masculinity, to return the vitality and strength that had been slowly draining from American men (p.58).

Indeed, multiple expressions of masculinity may coexist at any given time (Anderson, 1999). More importantly, many men cannot be categorized by any of the three responses noted by Kimmel. This is particularly true of a group of dissidents know as the Greenwich Village bohemians. These young insurgents of the early twentieth century provided a more radical critique of consumerist culture than any of the white "outsiders" before them (Savran, 1998). The Greenwich Village bohemians, most notably poet Maxwell Bodenheim, offered scathing critiques of capitalist production and alienated labor of the early 1900s. A Greenwich Village artist, "unlike the normative working man/husband/father, goes to great lengths to avoid work", gladly accepting economic hardships for a life of intellectual gain (Savran, 1998, p.48). These early bohemians did much to influence the next waves of white male resistance. Indeed, striking examples of outsider white masculinity are found in the writings of the Beats and Norman Mailer.

Shortly after World War II, masculinity underwent another crisis as many American men failed to meet the expectations of suburban, middle-class society (Kimmel, 1996). Dullsville culture of the 1950s unwittingly hatched a new group of radicals who not only sought deliverance from workaday masculinity, but also from the perceived banalities of being white. This was a group of "educated white middle-class youth whose reactions to the inconsistencies of American life was the stance of casting off its education, language, dress, manners and morality" (Ellison, 1953, p.228). The beat generation, as it became known as, expressed the symptoms of a crisis in masculinity and also offered a solution to the problem by "challenging the rigors of normativity" (Savran, 1998). Like their avant-garde predecessors, the Beats positioned themselves as alienated and indignant. Troubadours like Kerouac, Cassady, Ginsberg, and Burroughs considered themselves estranged from mainstream society. While sharing a disdain for wage labor, the Beats of the 1940s and 1950s were markedly different than their Greenwich Village

predecessors insofar as they lacked an articulated and developed political project (Savran, 1998). To be sure, the Beats understood less what they were struggling *for* than what they were *against*: the control systems of a consumerist society, a rigid masculinity largely defined through wage labor, and the joylessness of being white (Kimmel, 1996). Nevertheless, Kerouac et al consciously placed themselves as outcasts, members of an oppositional culture, and "freaky progenitors of new attitudes toward sanity and ethics" (Savran, 1998, p.53).

Without question, the paragon of Beat writing is Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957). In the tale, Sal Paradise (Kerouac) abandons the restrictive masculinity of both industrial employment and domesticity to become a debased vagabond in search of the "real" America. The road became a way of life uninhibited by superfluous commodities and dead-end jobs. Kerouac writes, "I was back on Times Square: and right in the middle of a rush hour, too, seeing with my innocent road-eyes the absolute madness and fantastic hoorair among themselves, the mad dream – grabbing, taking, giving, sighing, dying. Just so they could be buried in those awful cemetery cities beyond Long Island City" (1957, p.96). Similar to the tales of the traveling frontiersman, *On the Road* is a narrative of individualist masculine escape (albeit temporarily) from the corporate and suburban uniformity in which the acquisition of wealth and commodities was the raison d'etre of the era. By most accounts, it "deified the experience of cross-country travel by freewheeling male individuals as an antidote to bourgeois complacency" (Klinger, 1997 p.180). The character of Dean Moriarty (Neal Cassady), however, was the quintessential pariah to the jejune 1950s culture. As if romanticizing the cast of *On the Road*, Kimmel (1996) explains, "On the other side of the tracks from respectable middle-class conformity [of the 1950s] lurked the dangerous men, the rebellious nonconformists, who threatened social stability, domestic harmony, and corporate responsibility" (p.242). In their own paradoxical way, the Beats were disavowing the very society from which they enjoyed a privileged position. This refusal of a compliant mainstream was also an escape from middle-class whiteness.

As Paradise and Moriarty repudiated 1950s middle-class America in *On the Road*, they subsequently attached themselves to marginal cultures. This was manifest in the Beat's fetish for jazz: "The behatted tenorman was blowing at the peak of a wonderfully satisfactory free idea, a rising and falling riff that went from 'Ee-Yah!' to a crazier 'Ee-De-Lee-Ya!'...uproars of music and the tenorman had it and everyone knew he had it. Dean was clutching his head in the crowd and it was a mad crowd" (1957, p.179). At idiosyncratic moments, a renunciation of white conformist culture allowed the Beats to align themselves with a black underclass (read: outsider, resistant, and hip). Indeed, an affinity with jazz, marijuana, and other racialized elements of black culture became the "tools of their rebellion" (Cleaver, 1964, p.97). Although a refusal of whiteness may be read as progressive – especially in "race traitor" circles – it is also problematic insofar as it relies on an imagery of oppositionality that is highly stereotypical. Indeed, white countercultures have repeatedly disavowed whiteness and commodity culture only to romanticize, and simultaneously racialize, what they perceive to be cornerstones of black culture – marijuana, jazz, and the argot of "hip" (Savran, 1998; Reich, 1970). Kerouac describes Moriarty's fascination with jazz: "Dean was in a trance. The tenorman's eyes were fixed straight on him; he had a madman who not only understood but cared and wanted to understand more" (1957, p.180). For Kerouac, then, whiteness represented sobriety and alienation while non-whiteness remained a symbol of vitality, ecstasy and excitement. As Savran notes, "With its melancholic romanticization of otherness, Sal's desire completely – and horrifyingly – ignores the economic and social realities of African-America urban ghettos of the 1950s" (1998, p.61). Although the Beats were self-proclaimed outcasts of society, their skin color and sex remained a signifier of privilege and normativity. This contradictory status of a self-positioned underclass is also found in Mailer's *White Negro*.

Published the same year as *On the Road*, Mailer's essay *White Negro* consolidated the image of the oppressed and dissident white male of the Beats with, what he referred to as, the "hipster": an "American existentialist" and "frontiersman in the Wild West of American Night Life" (Mailer, cited in Savran, 1998, p.4). This version of the white male rebel, similar to Dean Moriarty, oscillated between the statuses of victim

and insurgent of the street. Not unlike Kerouac and the Beats, then, the hipster represented a flight from privilege and normativity, as well as an appropriation of marginalized (both racially and economically) culture. It was, to be sure, a form of white rebellion predicated on rebelling from whiteness. In fact, *White Negro* "invests black men with sexual potency, emotional resourcefulness, and disruptive, oppositional power that Mailer finds lacking in the dominant culture" (Wald, 1997, p.159). In this sense, a series of racial stereotypes common to the conservative right masquerades as a liberal mutiny against whiteness (Van Elteren, 1999). Evidently, both Kerouac and Mailer make light of "the true nature of oppression in the United States by blurring the difference between voluntary and forced outsiderism" (Van Elteren, 1999, p.90). Nevertheless, a refusal of whiteness is contingent on the adoption of black cultural signifiers. Representations of skateboarding reflect a similar appropriation with all its complexities.

Skateboarding and the White Male "Outsider"

While it is true that whiteness, by having its inherent social privileges called into question, is undergoing a post-liberation era crisis, there are also generational complexities that must be accounted for. The stalwart rhetoric of the conservative right, buttressed by the latest moral panic over rap music (or rather, the consumption of rap by white suburban youth), has given new merit to an utterance made by Eldridge Cleaver forty years ago: "Communication and understanding between the older and younger generations of whites has entered a crisis…To the youth, the elders are Ugly Americans; to the elders, the youth have gone mad" (1964, p.92). Skateboarding, and its depiction in legal discourse as an "urban pathology", exemplifies Cleaver's remarks.[4]

This section explains representations of renegade white masculinity within skateboarding, and to a lesser extent snowboarding texts. To illustrate the themes below, I rely on a medley of media – both alternative and popular – ranging from films and magazines to videogames and Internet sites. Some texts of boarders, I argue, portray a

[4] Skaters are repeatedly fined for trespassing and destruction of property. The accruement of multiple citations has made some skaters postmodern criminals, punished for play. As James Atkin notes, "A $50 skate ticket went to $800 all because I didn't pay it! Fuck! The thing is, I still have warrants out in San Diego for skating" (Lambert, 2003, par.14). Some skaters have even been incarcerated (albeit briefly) for skating without a helmet (cf. Edwards, 2004).

white form of rebellion reminiscent of Kerouac's *On the Road* and Mailer's *White Negro*. Like these countercultural scripts, skate narratives demonstrate a homosocial escape from what is constructed as a fantasized ideal of conformist culture. This is articulated around the nexus of whiteness. That is, a physical and symbolic flight from conformity is predicated on a departure from middle-class whiteness. To signify its refusal of the mainstream (i.e., the hegemony of being white), boarding imagery often borrows and romanticizes black expressive culture in a manner not unlike other countercultural texts. And while many theorists would justly describe such co-optation as an "inverted form of racism" (Savran, 1998), the ambiguities in representation could also point to a legitimate rejection of whiteness and its legacy of oppression. As Cleaver (1964) once observed, "The new generations of whites, appalled by the sanguine and despicable record carved over the face of the globe by their race in the last five hundred years, are rejecting the panoply of white heroes, whose heroism consisted in erecting the inglorious edifice of colonialism and imperialism" (p.90). Herein lies an alternate explanation of white dissent in skateboard texts.

Despite its meteoric popularity, skateboarding – much like Beatitude – is constructed as an escape from the mainstream.[5] As Bazorda (2004) argues, "Skating gives me a change to check out of the rat race for a while and visit the world of development and discovery of character" (p.74). Similarly, a recent print advert for Anti-Hero skateboards illustrates the disorderly ethos of skaters by constructing its opposite. In one frame, a white male skater is shown performing a stunt. In the opposing frame is an image of the skater's ostensible antithesis: a white male wearing a business suit, carrying a briefcase and apparently making transactions on his mobile phone. The juxtaposition solicits a dualism if only to ridicule the middle-class ambition embodied by the textual Other: the white male yuppie. This can be read as an expression of white rebellion from an "undesirable" image of whiteness. Certainly, the use of a business suit (the iconoclast of youth) remains a timeless signifier of the asphyxiating conformity of the white middle-class. A similar scenario is found in Stacy Peralta's film, *The Search for Animal Chin*

[5] "Beatitude" was a term Kerouac used to describe the attitude and demeanor of a typical "hot" Beat. The original Beats, Van Elteren (1999) notes, were "flamboyant individualists, speedy, mad to live…crazy, talkative, shiny-eyed nut[s] who ran from bar to bar, pad to pad" (p.86).

(1987). In one scene professional skater Mike McGill is viewing a televised interview of a fictitious skateboard impresario, dressed in a suit and necktie. This avaricious white man, clearly presented as oblivious to the skate philosophy, forces McGill to launch the television set from an apartment window. McGill condescendingly asks, "Ever done a taildrop, guys?" The gesture hints at the insincerity of American business (Have they ever ridden a skateboard?), as well as the fate of the TV program (It was "taildropped" from a balcony).

Skateboard media also parodies the perceived emasculation of middle-class white men. An advert for Sidecuts skateboard wheels pictures a skater performing a railslide. The caption for the ad reads, "Another hard day at the office" (*TransWorld*, March, 2003). Both image and text signal an explicit refusal of white middle-class employment. As C.Wright Mills once wrote, "The white collar man is the hero as victim, the small creature who is acted upon but who does not act, who works along unnoticed in somebody's office or store, never talking aloud, never talking back, never taking a stand" (Kimmel, 1996, p.240). To escape this immanent feminization, a street tough masculinity is often articulated in skateboarding texts. The skater appearing in the Sidecuts advert challenges traditional notions of what it means to be white, corporate, and male in Western society. Not only is the skater *not* at the "office", he is also "playing" instead of "working" altogether.

Indeed, the workaday conservatism of the corporate employee is repeatedly satirized in skate culture. As a response to the onset of "metrosexuality" and the new age "company man", *Big Brother* skateboard magazine ran a brief article titled, "Health and Beauty Section: Ghetto Weight Training", which provided instructions for assembling a cinderblock bench press.[6] The writer espouses, "If you're tired of the spandex heroes, here's a healthy alternative to staying fit and out of the gym" (Bourne, 2000, p.108). Yet a refusal of the metrosexual hinges on a hetero-normativity that denigrates perceived homosexuality. This same magazine markets t-shirts bearing the silhouette of an inline

[6]The "metrosexual" is usually a male yuppie that takes extreme care in his personal appearance – such as hair care and physical fitness. Allegedly, the metrosexual is stereotypically gay in all aspects other than sexual orientation – see Real Madrid's football demigod David Beckham (Simpson, 2002).

skater enriched with a rainbow flag, suggesting the sport of rollerblading is somehow "gayer" or more feminine than skateboarding (Beal & Wilson, forthcoming). Interestingly, skate media rescues an impending emasculation with a rather romantic understanding of street life, and more importantly, the Ghetto. What is co-opted by white youth is ultimately what Majors (1990) refers to as "cool pose": "an attempt to carve out an alternative path to achieve the goals of dominant masculinity" (p.111). Although Majors does not openly recognize it, the style and spectacle of black men "to look good at all costs" is largely a cinematic construction parlayed by the likes of Ron Shelton's *White Men Can't Jump* (1992) and a virtual monolith of black masculinity on MTV – the gangsta rap of Tupac, Biggie, and more recently, 50 Cent (Brown, 1997, p.107). Visual narratives, then, often reclaim manliness by appropriating the racialized imagery of urban black masculinity. This accounts for the prolific cross-referencing of hip-hop culture in skate media.

The images used in skate culture are rich with racial signifiers predicated on urban and gang insignia. Premium, for instance, uses board graphics featuring turntables (an icon of Dj-ing), diamond-encrusted symbols (connoting the "bling" ethos of popular hip-hop), as well as cartoon images of Latino gangs, replete with low-riding bandanas, khaki trousers, and white undershirts designed to showcase an exhaustive collection of scratcher tattoos. Magazines also feature photo galleries that clearly illustrate ghetto contextualization. Concrete skate parks are a veritable collage of spray paint graffiti (by all means a disrespectful gesture to some elders).[7] The street tough masculinity of skaters is also evinced by the names of many brands. Ghetto Child, a manufacturer of skate wheels, accentuates an array of urban-influenced graphics alongside a motley crew of sponsored skaters. In both videos and adverts, "Ghetto Child" Chad Muska (also an owner of Circa footwear) epitomizes a white adoption of black cultural signifiers. Not only is Muska outfitted with bandanas, boom boxes, and four-finger rings, he even endorses his own rap record, featuring Flavor Flav of Public Enemy, KRS-One, and Ice-T ("Muskabeatz News", 2003). As Rabinowitz (2002) explains, "Chad has proven to be one of the most well-known and originally-styled skaters of his time, and attributes some of

[7] Personal communication with an alderman candidate in Medicine Hat, Alberta: July, 2003.

his skateboard inspiration to the influences of music and culture" (par.3). Much like the Beats, Muska's authenticity (as a white skater) is discursively contingent on incorporation of urban culture (read: black resistance).

At the level of representation, white skaters have also adopted the argot typically attached to urban black masculinity. Larry Clark's film, *Kids* (1995) – while highly problematic for its vacuous portrayal of youth – is a tale of two white skaters named Telly and Casper. The pair often refers to each other as "nigger" and borrows much of the baggy garbs commonly associated with hip-hop culture. Yet as Reeves suggests, "Clark's unyielding and 'verite' focus on the summer-day transgression of two hip-hop dressing/street slang-wielding/40 once-drinking/blunt-smoking/pussy-conquering white teenage males…provides a focus on what's making white American youth so crazy: Dey hanging out and acting like dem nasty, demoralizing niggas" (Giroux, 1998, p.46). Thus, Clark's portrayal unwittingly vilifies both white street skaters and their cultural reference point: urban black masculinity. Other scripts, such as an article featured in *Big Brother* (February, 2004), imitate the art of "playing the dozens": a verbal exhibition used to playfully disrespect and assert symbolic dominance over another individual (Pease, 1992). This confrontation of wits is often described as a practice among black men (Pease, 1992). The article is titled, "Shit Talking Session" and features four white skaters competing with one another on a handrail (Peterson, 2004). In the skate context, playing the dozens is verbal ridicule predicated on a lack of creativity and an unimaginative use of skate settings: "Is that your only trick?", "Can you do anything other than heelflip?", "Didn't you do that slide last time?" And if skate narratives rely on stereotypical black argot for authenticity, they also adopt hip-hop music.

Within skateboard media, an outlaw image is cultivated, in part, through an association with hip-hop and gangsta rap. As Lipsitz suggests, "White artists traditionally have looked to black cultures as sources of cultural self-fashioning because these cultures have nurtured and sustained" an intelligible critique of whiteness (cited in Wald, 1997, p.158). While the Beats thrived on the spontaneity and exuberance of jazz music, today's rebel white males often rely on hip-hop to signify protest (Roediger, 1994). Hip-hop,

Roediger (1994) explains, "offers white youth…the spontaneity, experimentation, humor, danger, sexuality, physical movement and rebellion absent from what passes as white culture" (p.15). This is particularly evident in skateboard media. Videogames such as *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* and *Thrasher: Skate and Destroy* enlist a soundtrack featuring rap artists Erik B and Rakim, Grandmaster Flash, Sugar Hill Gang, and Run-D.M.C. Similar to Mailer's fantasy, black music "embodies an ecstatic, orgasmic, and utopian wholeness and plenitude that have been lost in white, bourgeois American culture" (Savran, 1998, p.50). So as Muska appropriates both the styles and sounds of what is perceived to be black culture, his "street cred" is rooted in a white suburban fantasy of blackness. Within skate magazines and MTV, urban blackness is reduced to a univocal expression of "pimpin' gangsta-dom". In skateboard culture, adopting the fantasy of black masculinity (including the gangsta persona) enables an escape from the fantasy of white dullness. Far from being muted, whiteness speaks in many voices within skate culture. Blackness, on the other hand, is rigidly portrayed as the purveyor of "hipness" to the white world. For Kerouac, whiteness represented a stigma of shame and a joyless existence, while black culture – most romantically associated with jazz in *On the Road* – was the essence of vitality, spontaneity, and freedom (Savran, 1998). With its sustained use of both gangsta style and rap music, the same may be true of skate culture. Elements of freestyle underwrite both cultural practices.

Through the use of spontaneous prose, Kerouac attempted to capture the "physical poetry" he felt when listening to jazz. The Beats, Van Elteren notes, sought to "recover the body in poetry through a return to speech rhythms, through disordering of conventional syntax, through a lineation based on break" (1999, p.100). In this sense, Kerouac's words embodied a physical exuberance that he found lacking in 1950s conservative white culture. Kerouac (1995), "sick and tired of the conventional English sentence…which seemed…so ironbound in its rules" found refuge in spontaneous, ad lib writing (p.486). It was a "free response to the instrumental blues chorus he heard in jazz" (Charters, 1995, p.449). In many ways, skate and snowboard texts reflect a similar kinship between movement and music. Hip-hop beats set a cadence for sessioning in skateboarding. In Spike Jonze's *Video Days* (1991) professional skater Josh Kallis

performs tricks to the beats of DJ Shadow, while the Hook-Ups gang is seen stunting on a police cruiser to the rhythm of "Damn It Feels Good to be a Gangsta" (by Geto Boys). Indeed, the stuttering scratch of hip-hop records provides an impressive complement to the dizzying flips of the skateboard. And, as Kerouac warned, "It's all gotta be non stop and ad libbing within each chorus, or the gig is shot" (1995, p.453). Improvised variation and spontaneity are crucial elements of both freestyle rapping and skate culture. Not only is its absence fodder for "playing the skate dozens", but a lack of creativity is reprehensible. The white rapper, B-Rabbit (played by Eminem) in Curtis Hanson's *8 Mile* (2002) is castigated for stalling on stage at a freestyle showdown. And in Tony Hawk's videogames players actually lose points for performing a trick more than once. For Kerouac, "Spontaneous writing, as a technique, reflects a cultural set of values which pins hopes upon the individual who can come up with something original and new" (Charters, 1991, p.xxv). Much like rap music and Kerouac's prose, skateboarding can be read as a "performative language" insofar as it ultimately expresses a critique of social space (Kiendl, 2004). In addition, "each solo flight, or improvisation, represents – like the successive canvasses of a painter – a definition of his identity" (Ellison, 1953, p.234).

Hip-hop references are also visually revealed in skate media. An advert for Think skateboards features a young white skater dressed in baggy trousers and a hooded-sweatshirt with oversized headphones (a staple of urban DJing) wrapped around the collar. The street-toughness of skating is symbolically validated by visual references to DJ culture. Gangsta style – involving a rejection of middle-class masculinity defined by corporate success – is also expressed in video imagery.[8] Shorty's skateboards released a video in 2002 aptly titled, *Guilty* – suggestive of the criminalization of street skating. The cover of the DVD presents members of the skate team in a courtroom dressed in prison-orange coveralls. In addition, Muska (a Shorty's member) is rarely depicted without his encumbering ghetto blaster. Interestingly, the Muska character appearing in Tony Hawk's videogames has a portable stereo strapped to his back (presumably playing the Muskabeatz mix tape). Indeed, boarding and beats are virtually inseparable. This is apparent in several adverts for music/boarding festivals such as *Van's Warped Tour* and

[8] (Anderson, 1999)

Snow Sessions – a medley of riding at day and hip-hop at night. An event organizer explains, "I like to listen to hip-hop and snowboard. It's like poetry, really. And snowboarding is an artistic way to express yourself…When you bring [hip-hop and snowboarding] together it's an unstoppable combination" (Cutchin, 2002, par.1). These remarks suggest that hip-hop is also perfunctory of skateboarding's off-season counterpart, snowboarding.

Perhaps the most contradictory refusal of whiteness is evinced by the imagery and historical contextualization of snowboarding. Its media is abound with gangsta culture and references to the 'hood, yet participants of the sport remain overwhelmingly white. To understand this phenomenon it is essential to historicize the social acceptance of snowboarding vis-à-vis the dominant ski culture. The post-war economic boom in North America resulted in increasing disposable income for a large section of the (white) population. This created a demographic fit for a burgeoning ski industry. To market an image of alpine authenticity, North American ski resorts appropriated a particular "white ethnicity" from Europe (Coleman, 2002). As Coleman (2002) explains, "Marketing western mountains, clothes, restaurants, hotels, and ski instructors as European enabled the ski industry to legitimate its products in the international ski world at the same time that it helped its clientele acquire a culturally constructed white identity through their behavior as skiers, tourists, consumers" (p.146). Authenticity in the ski industry was, and remains, heavily reliant upon Bavarian and Swiss signifiers such as Obermeyer ski jackets, Dachstein boots, Volkl skis, Tyrolia bindings, and so on. The uber-European slopes of North America provided the setting from which early snowboarders were rejected in the 1970s. More importantly, they supplied a ready-made system of signs – representing European leisure culture – from which snowboarders could rebel against.

Snowboarders were widely banned from North American ski resorts in the 1970s (Humphreys, 2003). They represented a winterized version of the countercultural surfers, symbolizing reckless abandonment and carefree hedonism (Humphreys, 2003). So in many ways, these early riders were, in fact, rejected from the mountains. Today, snowboarding retains much of this outlaw imagery, despite its mainstreaming

(Snowboarding is currently an Olympic event). This is enabled by its adoption of gangsta culture (Anderson, 1999). A Nordic mood, signified by the long-winded names of tight, bright ski clothing and equipment, is symbolically rejected by boarders' use of baggy, earthier-colored garbs (Heino, 1999). To signify its disgust with the avaricious and parochial ski industry, snowboard narratives often rely on racialized urban imagery. As a binary, an urban black gangsta is a perfect retort to the alpine white "Eurotrash". Some riders even refer to the mountain as "da hood" (Anderson, 1999). Yet a monotony of urban black gangsta culture "suggests an uncritical, romanticized view of blackness, one that privileges blackness as *the* authentically liberatory counterpart to whiteness" (Rasmussen et al, 2001, p.11). This reliance on gangsta sounds and fashion, however, conceals the overwhelming whiteness of the sport's representation.

Snowboarders, to be sure, were once the outlaws of alpine leisure. Yet within a short period, impresarios of the ski industry received an economic epiphany over these mountain rebels. A growing demographic of affluent white youth, eager to differentiate themselves from their parents and their parents' sports, proved to be a very lucrative market. And while snowboarding is now a multi-million dollar business, it nevertheless retains its renegade image by adopting urban black masculinity. Indeed, "imaginary blackness is being projected outward, facelessly, as the means to orchestrate a truly global market in leisure products and as the centerpiece of a new, corporately directed version of youth culture centered not on music and its antediluvian rituals but upon visuality, icons, and images" (Gilroy, 2000, p.270). An unavoidable idiosyncrasy remains: the music and fashions originating from inner city boroughs (like Brooklyn) now co-exist with white affluence on the slopes of North American bourgeois culture – a social scene historically excluding black individuals. Yet online editorials suggest some boarders are clearly disillusioned about the "great white alpine gangsta":

> This suburban gangsta silliness has got to stop. Board graphics with shotguns and hip hop graffiti? Tagging ski resorts and sipping forties in the parking lot? AK-47s? Yeah, when was the last time any of us saw high-rise buildings and crack houses at a goddamn

ski resort? Do you take a subway train to go jibbing tough-guy? Would most of you know an urban ghetto if your ass was kicked right into one" (Carstens, 1994, par.14)?

Tom Wolfe (1970) once referred to this as "Radical Chic": a curiously bourgeois practice among white socialites of romanticizing oppositional cultures of color. And so it seems, at the level of representation, that blackness haunts the white imagination. White culture desires an affinity with blackness (channeled through style and music) but a comfortable distance must remain. In a textual way, white youth require "'a bit of the other' to enhance the blank landscape of whiteness" (hooks, 1992, p.29). Aesthetically, the 'hood may be brought to the hill, but the riders remain as white as the snow.[9]

Whiteness, textualized as conventional culture, is also *physically* repudiated by using the road narrative. The archetype for which is commonly cited as Kerouac's *On the Road* (Laderman, 2002). The tale of Paradise and Moriarty – most expressive of postwar youth cultural rebellion – commemorates "subversion as a literal venturing outside of society…Exceeding the borders of the culture it makes possible, for better or worse, the road represents the unknown" (Laderman, 2002, p.19, 1). *On the Road* is a celebration of movement and journey with little regard for destination. As Kerouac writes, "We were all delighted, we all realized we were leaving the confusion and nonsense behind and performing our one and noble function of the time, *move*" (1957, p.121). Interestingly, several skate narratives appear to follow the "roadmap" sketched by Kerouac.

A recent issue of *Big Brother* can be read as a general barometer for masculine escapism in skate media. An article titled, "Homeland Insecurity" rousts suburban youth to embark on skate journeys across the globe. The writer explains, "Skaters are blessed with an international group of friends – staying at home and only skating the local spots is for the birds…You can…hit the road with a few bucks, skate new shit and have a better time than 99% of the other stale, stagnant, scared people on the planet" (Charnoski, 2004,

[9] A notable exception to the "whitewash" of snowboarding is black rider Ben Hinckley and a small but acrobatic group of Japanese freestylers headed by Takahiro Ishihara. The women's professional circuit is equally saturated with white riders.

p.83). Similarly, the April 2004 edition of *Thrasher* magazine is titled, "King of the Road" and features four teams of five male skaters traveling across America, finishing their respective journeys in (ironically enough) San Francisco – a major destination for the cast of *On the Road*. The editor of the issue romanticizes "the thrill of new spots, the laughs, and the freedom that comes with being the master of your own destiny on the open highway of stoke" (Burnett, 2004, p.12). Essentially, the King of the Road contest was a narrative of homosocial escape from a stagnant life in suburbia and a search for freedom through exploration, dodging authority, and general hijinks on the road.

Movement is repeatedly imagined as an escape from white suburbia. This is textually revealed in references to the fixity of middle-class employment, domestic responsibility, and authority. Yet time and again the road trip is a gendered movement reserved for males. Participants of the King of the Road contest, for instance, were exclusively male. Even the late '80s industry film, *The Search for Animal Chin* (widely regarded as the most renown skate film ever made) is a masculine pilgrimage to skate spots across California (Switch Staff, 2004). The purpose of the journey is to locate another important male skater: the fictitious pioneer of skateboarding, Won Ton "Animal" Chin (an exoticized Other?). Likewise, Casey La Scala's film, *Grind* (2003) features a group of four white males living their own manifest destiny by following a professional skate tour to California. Along the way, the crew is sure to "pick up" a bevy of young women (one of which steals the tour van).

By the logic of the road narrative, movement is maintained purely for thrills. As professional skater Mike Vallely once remarked, "It's about the journey and not the destination" (Bazorda, 2004, p.76). An article featured in *SBC Skateboarder* chronicles the Western Canadian road trip of five white males. The author's use of prose is unmistakably Kerouacian: "We stayed in Calgary until our welcome was worn. We blasted through Red Deer and Edmonton. We searched for (and got kicked out of) several Alberta spots, met up with Poppa West and blasted out as though the law was on our tail" (Doubt, 2003, p.178). This outlaw fantasy, while validated by Moriarty's knack for auto theft in *On the Road*, remains an illusion in the skater's tale. Charters (1991) succinctly

captures both versions: "Though they rushed back and forth across the country on the slightest pretext, gathering kicks along the way, their real journey was inward; and if they seemed to trespass most boundaries, legal and moral, it was only in the hope of finding a belief on the other side" (p.xxviv). In this sense, transience is valued as an alternative lifestyle and a critical weapon against conservative culture (Laderman, 2002).

Countercultural texts construct (North) America as both the source of oppression and unlimited freedom (Savran, 1998). In skate anecdotes, North America represents a daunting land of police harassment but also a wellspring for endless sessioning. The dialectic of the road, as both a path to hackneyed suburbia and also a gateway to its exile, is an allegory for the dialectic of whiteness. While whiteness signifies a legacy of dullness, its constructed normativity enables the Beats and skaters to adopt positions of marginality. That is, the privileges of being white afford the opportunity to escape the perceived banalities of white suburbia. Like the road itself, whiteness represents a potential for both conformity and escape; the road can lead to the domestic fixity of the suburbs or the thrills of the inner city. Instead of being "culturally empty" (Perry, 2001) or "invisible" (Frankenberg, 1997; Dyer, 1997, 1993), whiteness in countercultural texts is racialized as vapid. Far from being undefined, then, whiteness is emblematic of suburban conformity epitomized by an array of consumer signifiers like Michael Bolton music, J. Crew and Eddie Bauer fashions, and Friends/Frasier sitcoms. As Perry (2001) explains, "Whiteness may be defined through the language of tastes and popular culture" (p.80). Although it remains a discursive ideal, whiteness is the object from which skaters are textually escaping. It is not hidden or transparent, but rather readily visible in its irksome incarnate.

Conclusion: The Market and White Male "Blacklash"

Narratives of skateboarding represent a physical and sartorial escape from white suburbia. It is a flight from adulthood, a fantasy of whiteness, and masculinity defined by middle-class employment. If being white is the norm, skateboard texts construct an alternative version of reality that castigates the normativity of whiteness. A recent advert for Kre-per skateboard trucks relies on outsider metaphors to enact this racial binary. The

advert suggests, "Don't follow the herd", while an image of a lone black (inflatable) sheep is demarcated from the "white" followers. Presenting itself as "the black sheep of trucks", Kre-per equates whiteness with conformity, while blackness signals creativity and independence. Despite the claims of critical race theorists (cf. Perry, 2001), whiteness is far from invisible. In alternative skateboard media, it is racialized and denigrated as authoritarian, corporate, and conformist. Yet an exodus from whiteness – which, in many ways, is also a fantasy – is made possible by adopting the imagined properties of blackness perpetuated by MTV and other media spectacles. In this sense, representations of renegade white masculinity in skate media resemble countercultural narratives of previous eras. The authenticity of street culture, while often packaged in white models (i.e., Kerouac and Muska), is dependent on a fiction of blackness. It may be that the cultural capital of fantasized black masculinity is used to sell commodities. Indeed, the political economy of "blackness", as music and style, is an important element of skate culture that warrants further study.

The most revealing representations of racial signifiers are found in adverts, suggesting the marketability of the margins. A discursive attachment to a perceived black culture links social meanings to both the advertised product, and also its consumption. Faurschou (1990) refers to this as "symbolic divestment": the process by which commodities "import from some other source – a source necessarily outside capitalism's exchange relation – what can now only be the idea…of a symbolic relation" (p.239). Thus, by using imagery of hip-hop and resistance, American business is able to endow its products with social meanings other than objects of capitalist exchange. That is, "fashion excavates history, non-capitalist or 'exotic' societies, marginal or oppositional social groups, etc., for the sign of a relationship whose meaning appears to be generated outside of the logic of equivalence"(Faurschou, 1990, p.239). This is illustrated by an advert for Kool cigarettes recently appearing in *Maxim* magazine. The ad pictures a group of black DJs and MCs and claims the product to be "The vibe of the street turned into a pack". The tagline reads: "DJs are the Masters of Hip Hop like Kool is the Master of Menthol. Kool Mixx special edition packs are our mark of respect for these hip hop players" (*Maxim*, 2004). The cigarettes, as well as street culture, are coded as inherently black. As

the advert dictates, smoking is a form of black expressive culture, analogous to hip-hop, which has little to do with billion dollar tobacco cartels and senate hearings. Images and sounds of "authentic black culture" maintain market currency as icons of "hip". Nowhere is this more evident than music television.

Media leviathans, like Viacom and Chum TV (Canada), are gatekeepers for not only a monotony of music videos, but also the representations of race and gender within those clips. Because of MTV's omnipotence, Banks (1996) argues, "the channel is able to impose its standards on most music videos financed by the major record labels" (p.182). What is more, brands like Microsoft and Motorola often finance entire videos so long as their products are visually and even lyrically endorsed by the artists (Joseph, 2004). This means large corporations, or rather, a wealthy group of mostly white men, regulate the ways in which black masculinity is articulated in popular culture. As a result, a fantasy of the "thug life" overwhelmingly defines black masculinity in the "society of the spectacle". Yet such marketing ploys are not necessarily targeted toward black urban youth. On the contrary, it is estimated that at least 80 % of all hip-hop culture is consumed by non-African Americans (Joseph, 2004). As a result, cool consumerism and youthful hedonism – connoted by hip-hop culture – is a curious indulgence of middle-class white men. Rather than mobilize radical social change, Osgerby (2001) argues, consumption of oppositional cultures, like rap, leaves "wider power structures and systems of inequality intact" (p.203). Yet these images of black masculinity are also embraced by skateboard culture.

Several companies rely on racialized imagery of the "urban jungle". This is evinced by adverts and videos by Shorty's, Blind, and Ghetto Child. Yet such a cultural appropriation presents little risk to the predominantly white consumers of boarding products. As Anderson (1999) notes, "The dominant race and class position of most snowboarders allows them to appropriate gangsta style with little fear that they will experience the discrimination and hostility faced by black youths who adopt this image" (p.68). Selling images of white rebellion provides white America with a housetrained version of hip-hop culture. Skate culture, marketed as a white rendering of blackness, is

also a failsafe capitalist endeavor. Relying on gangsta imagery to ridicule whiteness and sell skateboards hardly threatens an economic structure that perpetuates racial subordination. In a way, a stylistic appropriation of the gangsta image refuses to disrupt the privileges of white, middle-class, heterosexual masculinity. Moreover, an association with black masculinity offsets flaccid white middle-class manliness (Wald, 1997). However, ambiguities at the level of representation leave room for an alternative reading of "white ethnicity".[10]

On one level, the criminalization of skaters has created another marginalized urban culture. As Rowley (2004) writes, "The law of skateboarding is a messed up place…Kids everywhere get arrested, harassed, fined, and victimized almost everyday" (p.194). This is visually supported by several adverts that portray skaters being hounded by security guards (those sentinels of private property). An article in *Big Brother* even noted the brief incarceration of an amateur skater for outstanding trespassing citations and refusing to wear a helmet (Edwards, 2004). At the level of representation, skaters are escaping an oppressive white authority. As mentioned, this also entails a racial departure from whiteness. There is, however, a progressive element to this escapism. As Gilroy (1987) observes with British punk movements, "If contact with black culture was to be maintained, then a disavowal of whiteness was called for, not by the blacks themselves but by punk culture's own political movements" (p.160). Involvement with the Rock Against Racism project in the late 1970s was ostensibly contingent upon a refusal of whiteness. During this period, whiteness was embodied in the racist commentary of rock musicians Eric Clapton and David Bowie (Gilroy, 1987). As a stigma of authority, whiteness is equally rejected in skate media. This is symbolically expressed by an adoption of racialized signifiers of resistance. The cross-referencing of gangsta culture in skate texts may suggest a perceived kinship with other "criminalized" groups, such as urban black males. Yet "historically, the use of an (often distorted) image of African America life to express criticisms of 'white culture'…has hardly been an antidote to

[10] Hebdige (1979) refers to the adoption of ska and reggae music within punk cultures as an expression of "white ethnicity".

racism" (Roediger, 1994, p.16). Instead, cultural cooptation frequently conceals, by dehistoricizing and decontextualizing, relations of domination.

In a postmodern setting, resistance – romanticized as non-white – is reduced to sartorial novelty, devoid of socio-economic context. While skate texts are indeed critical of one particular ideal of whiteness, they often underplay the realities of structural racism. This is a noted problem with other white cultures of marginality. As Newitz and Wray (1997) explain, "One might read the grunge craze as an example of how the middle class interprets poverty as a consumer choice rather than an economic condition of scarcity and deprivation" (p.179). Class and race are understood as a set of consumptive patterns and cultural tastes, rather than a site of social privilege or disadvantage. Marginality becomes fetishized through sartorial trends. Such hazards reflect what hooks (1992) calls "eating the Other": a commercial process by which "racial differences [are] continually commodified and offered up as new dishes to enhance the white palate…The Other [is] eaten, consumed, and forgotten" (p.39). The discursive bond between white suburbia and the black 'hood, however, is also overwhelmingly homosocial.

As the road narratives of both skateboarding and the Beats illustrate, rebellion and escapism are implicitly masculine. In most tales women appear as peripheral, decorative characters, or worse, as "acquiescent wives" and objects of sexual conquest. Women are accepted in skate culture only by demonstrating their "masculinity". This is illustrated by the remarks of one skate author: "Vania is a cute Brazilian girl that can do backside tailslides on handrails. She skates tough and knows how to take a slam. Her two front teeth have permanently turned black from falling on her face" (Nelson, 2004, p.35). Such comments also hint at the construction of Otherness in escapist road narratives of skate culture. Some road trips are also reflective of a distorted history of America. As Berra (2002) explains, "We would be going on a road trip for an entire month looking for spots across America…These would be new spots – unseen territory – like when Christopher Columbus set sail for the new world" (p.171). The road narrative, as an implicit escape from normativity, often constructs a fantasized version of the Other in prose echoing colonial conquest. While there appears to be a refusal of whiteness in some texts, other

narratives fall back on the long-standing racist trope of exoticizing the Other. This does not mean, however, that all skate media is compatible with white male backlash politics.

Studies that fix alternative sports within backlash politics often ignore the age of its participants, and more importantly the inferior social status of youth. The large majority of skaters, an estimated 85%, are under the age of eighteen years (Brooke, 2003). While this is not confirmed in skate imagery, it does suggest the importance of ethnographic work in balancing textual analyses. Such studies may challenge what Kusz (2001) refers to as the "youthification" of white male backlash. Quite simply, "Whiteness as a site of privilege is not absolute but rather crosscut by a range of other axes of relative advantage or subordination" (Frankenberg, 2001, p.76). In a culture like skateboarding, points of articulation are not limited to race, class, gender and sexuality. They must also include the contingent of youth. Since the 1920s, Frith explains, "the young…have come to symbolize leisure, to embody good times…But it is because they are not really free that this matters…It is because they lack power that the young account for their lives in terms of play [and] focus their politics on leisure" (cited in Brake, 1985, p.189). Indeed, a bevy of cultural texts posit youth as a site of desire and fetishization (Giroux, 1998). Within popular culture, youth are only valued as either cultural producers (fodder for marketable trends) or voracious consumers (Who else spends more time on the 'Net?).

Sport has long been a site in which men have attempted to resuscitate masculinity. Thus, "it has served to bolster a sagging ideology of male superiority and has helped to reconstitute masculine hegemony in the 19th and 20th centuries" (Messner & Sabo, 1990, p.9). How does this relate to skateboarding? Based on representation, skaters often resist bureaucratization and even the label of "sport". While snowboarders are gradually and begrudgingly succumbing to Olympicization, skaters are staunchly opposed to such bureaucratic measures. As Carnie (2004) explains, "In the current climate, skateboarding needs a governing body that is run by skateboarders so that none of these nonskateboard groups/corporations [IOC] are given the power to regulate contests, standardize skateparks or force you to wear a helmet when riding down the street" (p.87). By

positioning itself against everything mainstream, there is a potential to challenge hegemonic understandings of both race and gender relations.

Popular depictions of skateboarding, such as *X-Games*, rely on a subcultural veil to conceal white normativity (Kusz, 2003). Yet recognizing whiteness and how it appears in popular culture is an important element in its "demystification" (Aanerud, 1997). In a way, alternative skate media actually contribute to this project by naming, if not disrupting, a middle-class white conformity. This is a moment in which whiteness is self-critical. In the twenty-first century, Frankenberg (2001) suggests, "we see whiteness reasserted by white people and also whiteness under critical scrutiny by a range of people *including whites*" (p.82, my italics). As a result, renegade white masculinity cannot always be explained through the politics of white male backlash. Skateboard texts, though heavily reliant on a racialized understanding of street culture, represent a refusal of whiteness. Skate narratives may be progressive insofar as they frame and define a normative status that passes largely unnoticed in (white) popular cultural texts. Whiteness is less recentred than parodied in skateboard image and text. It seems many theorists of critical race studies can only posit normative rebellion as a restoration of white male dominance, when in fact, resistance is much more complex. Indeed, "there are many white youths who desire to move beyond whiteness. Critical of white imperialism and 'into' difference, they desire cultural spaces where boundaries can be transgressed, where new and alternative relations can be formed" (hooks, 1992, p.36). In the end, some angry white men are not refusing an imagined multiculturalist status quo, but rather they are rejecting the white supremacy fostered by their forefathers.

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Conclusion: Skateboarding After Whiteness

Race is overwhelmingly present in skateboard media. Not only is it evident in representations of street culture, but race is also depicted in adversarial forms. For this reason, narratives of skateboarding are often wedged in a social binary that is, quite literally, "black or white". Yet there is much more at work in these texts than a simple racial hierarchy. Instead, a process of cooptation frequently undermines the authority of whiteness. That is, representations of race are complemented by an unequivocal escape from racial domination. Such intricacies often dispute the existing scholarly studies of subcultures and critical race theory. As a conclusion, I hope to illustrate the ways in which these academic disciplines are both useful and usefully challenged by examining a sport culture that is engulfed in commercialism and whiteness. Finally, a deconstruction of whiteness in skateboarding would not be complete without theorizing its destruction. I ask, Is there a skateboarding culture after whiteness?

My work explains a (sub)culture in which membership is determined by patterns of consumption. As such, I entertain a series of arguments rooted in the production-consumption dialectic and apply each to skateboard culture. Early subcultural work, while attentive to the political economy of youth culture, is plagued by a pastoral nostalgia for "pure" resistance. A recent song title from the International Noise Conspiracy doubles as a rather appropriate aphorism for early subcultural studies: "Capitalism Stole My Virginity" (Lyxzen, 2001). Since conspicuous consumption is such a vital part of skate culture, it is important to negotiate the changing expressions of authenticity and selling out. To deal with such complexities, a subcultural theory that privileges a pre-capitalist purity must be updated, if not entirely refurbished; Capitalism only steals "our virginity" if we allow it. More importantly, virginity – a metaphor for pre-market authenticity – is now a cultural myth. As Gilroy (2000) suggests, "We must be prepared to give up the illusion that cultural and ethnic purity ever existed" (p.250). In other words, virginity is overrated! Nevertheless, romantic notions of resistance celebrate a golden age long since passed (if one ever existed at all). Turning to the past to cope with the commercial present is racially and sexually regressive. Considering the ubiquity

of the market, any theory of meta-political resistance potentially overlooks the "revolutionary materials" supplied to the masses by capitalism (Kellner, 1995). Certainly resistance requires rethinking – a task undertaken by many cultural workers.

A group of social theorists have modified ideas of resistance to allow space for creative consumption. Urban youth, by this logic, are empowered through the "performative language" of skateboarding. Symbolic creativity, however, is too often (con)fused with resistance and transgression. In this sense, some cultural theorists have acted as veritable spokespersons for consumer capitalism (Frank, 1997; McGuigan, 1992). A celebration of consumer empowerment, while tempering economic reductionism, often ignores the stratified access to the resources of leisurely consumption. Perhaps consumerism *is* empowering, but for whom and where? A staggered distribution of wealth cannot be divorced from cultural consumption at any costs. Yet such a teetering debate, as my toils demonstrate, is both seductively entrapping and ultimately uninspiring.

An oscillation between production and consumption is theoretically limited since it remains shackled in a binary opposition that is fundamentally Eurocentric. By invoking dualisms, there are few cultural choices other than resistance or conformity. Evidently, subcultural studies have historically privileged the former practice (Thornton, 1996). A more fruitful project – one that would avoid this misguided polemic – focuses on an understudied facet of subcultural work. Essentially, if media is active in subcultural genesis (as some theorists rightly claim) then we must be attentive to the ways in which subcultures are represented. As a result, I explain the "representation of resistance" in skateboarding texts. In doing so, I find subversive *depictions* more readily confirmed than actual lived practices. This emphasizes the importance of maintaining an ideological critique in cultural studies.

In many ways, visual narratives provide the tools through which skateboarding is created and perceived. Skateboard media offer models for identity construction, including social prescriptions for gender behavior, and a smorgasbord of racial stereotypes

(Kellner, 1995). Following Kellner (1995), these narratives, in some ways, reify a dominant social order. Regardless of its countercultural rhetoric, skate media is designed to sell skateboarding as a commodity. In the process, the dominant liberal values of consumer empowerment and creative individualism are reaffirmed in skateboard texts. The political economy of skate media is often cloaked in a guise of cultural resistance. Countercultural images reside in magazines and videos owned by transnational media corporations. And these antiauthoritarian narratives, of course, are bound by the ultimate authority of capitalism: the cash nexus. Moreover, a reliance on gangsta imagery to sell skateboards actually lubricates an economic system that sustains racial subordination. In the same texts, however, the normativity of whiteness is also called into question. Far from concealing a racial status quo, skate media frames an ideal of white corporate conformity. As such, the themes of skate magazines and movies are a "central location for the production of knowledge and the generation of ideological currents" that sometimes reify both capitalism and patriarchy, but not necessarily whiteness (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2000, p.192). A turn to critical whiteness studies helps us understand these complications.

Since skateboarding is ultimately a culture of normativity (i.e., white heterosexual males), the inclusion of critical whiteness theory is an important part of my work. Reading (and writing) whiteness in cultural texts has also created space for alternative expressions of race, most notably white resistance. A refusal of white society by white men is well articulated in countercultural narratives. Some of these texts (Kerouac's *On the Road* and Mailer's *White Negro*) are useful in historicizing and explaining the alternative "angry white male" in skateboard culture. As such, my work has both borrowed from and challenged the existing fields of subcultural studies and critical whiteness theory. In doing so, however, some pitfalls within these disciplines are exposed. Many critical approaches to whiteness, for instance, discredit white male resistance by positioning it within a reactionary politics of the conservative right. These studies have only accounted for an "angry white man" eager to reassert the privileges of being white and male. Such arguments, however, contradict the representations in skateboard texts. Indeed, an alternative expression of renegade white masculinity is

provided in skate media without conspicuously recentering whiteness (The same may not be true of snowboarding media). A critical analysis of white male dissent must unpack the normativity of whiteness and take seriously its disavowal. The naming of whiteness, and the contradictions it presents, is relatively unexplored in subcultural theory.

In a way, Hebdige's (1979) notion of "white ethnicity" is an important point of departure. His study of 1970s punk culture is entirely unique among the Birmingham crew insofar as it hints at the white adoption of black music genres like rocksteady and ska. Within other subcultural studies, normativity and privilege are the properties of the mainstream, rather than the subversive culture. The idiosyncrasy of a "normative subculture" repeatedly underwrites my research. In studying this paradox through skateboarding, I have found a crucial drawback of subcultural theory. Quite simply, it does not account for the social advantage of subcultural members. On the contrary, privilege is something enjoyed by the mainstream or the State. Thus, skateboarding represents a subcultural contradiction that is best understood through the use of critical whiteness theory. Actually, the inadequacies of one field are explained by the other. Critical whiteness studies, on the one hand, may unpack the normativity of whiteness, but it has a limited understanding of white male dissent. Subcultural work, on the other hand, can make sense of youth cultural resistance, but it has little to say of normative subcultures.

White on White on Black, Or, The Role of a Cultural Theorist

It would be quite problematic to write race through skateboarding without accounting for the very invisibility of not only authorship, but also white authorship. As Dyer (1997) remarks, "The position of speaking as a white person is one that white people now almost never acknowledge and this is part of the condition and power of whiteness: white people claim and achieve authority for what they say by not admitting, indeed not realizing, that for much of the time they speak only for whiteness" (p.xiv). And if the purpose of looking at whiteness is to "dislodge it from its centrality" (Dyer, 1997), a necessary part of this venture involves self-reflexivity. In no uncertain terms, this is largely a white research project about a disavowal of whiteness in youth subcultures. And yet my study

remains incomplete so long as it originates from a critical eye of whiteness. By naming the constructed whiteness in skateboard media and even my own work, however, a privileged position of normativity is inexorably called into question. Framing whiteness in skateboard texts is useful on many levels. To be certain, there is a dual articulation of whiteness, as oppressor and as imitator, in skateboard media.

One version of whiteness – perhaps the most symbolically revealed – is based on suburban middle-class banality. This whiteness is sardonically constructed as tyrannical and conformist. As Roediger remarks, "It is not merely that whiteness is oppressive and false; it is that whiteness is nothing but oppressive and false" (cited in Winant, 2001, p.106). As such, challenging all forms of authority within skate media necessarily means questioning the normativity and domination of whiteness. Skateboard narratives both frame and parody the perceived lameness of being white. In this sense, whiteness is certainly visible in its dullest and most oppressive form (epitomized by white corporate men or security guards). Incidentally, this critique (or, rather, the racialization) is not limited to skateboard media alone. As George Carlin once remarked in a stand-up routine, "If you're white, you're lame. It's a law of nature" (Urbisci, 1996). By deconstructing the oppressive banalities of whiteness, its command is inevitably called into question. Indeed, the tyranny of whiteness is something to be rejected. And so it seems one expression of whiteness is rooted in authoritarianism and compliance. However, a disavowal of white culture and its bequest of oppression create another version of whiteness signified by ersatz, or what Roediger refers to as falsity.

To escape the perceived acquiescence of whiteness, skate media adopts racialized imagery of black culture. This creates the second ostensible incarnate of whiteness in skate media, the cultural imitator. Whiteness, as a performance in skateboarding, is dependent upon Otherness. It is a "relational concept, unintelligible without reference to nonwhiteness" (Winant, 2001, p.107). Thus, a rejection of whiteness is symbolically contingent upon a mythical black culture mediated by white America. It may be that skaters' refusal of white authority and oppression is reliant upon an imitation of oppositional signifiers. At the level of representation, whiteness in skateboarding is a

caricature of black gangsta mythology. Suburban whiteness could be read as a forgery of urban blackness. Moreover, it is a paragon of what Whitesell (2003) calls, "Gangsta-phrenia": a condition in which white upper-class youth adopt black urban mythology to disavow their privilege. This argument, however, is seriously marred by a reliance on racial dualisms. That is, street style and authenticity are reserved for black males, while wealth and professional success are privy only to white men. Authenticity – the quality by which white rappers or "wiggers" are discredited – is the product of racialized thinking. Such a dualism is not only essentialist, but it also excludes women of all races. As a result, there is an undeniable need to move beyond the boundaries of the binary.

The crippling limitations of dualistic thinking reduce the breadth of racial representation. In a way, the Eurocentricity of the binary – as value-laden and hierarchical – actually returns to haunt whiteness. On the surface, white youth are ultimately offered a zero sum identity through skateboard culture. Whiteness represents either a culture of oppression or no culture at all. It can only be explained as either cultural oppressor or cultural imitator. Yet "the idea that whiteness is nothing more than appropriation rests on the twin assumptions that cultures 'belong' to racial groups and that there are clear and identifiable lines that separate and demarcate racialized peoples internally and externally" (Rasmussen et al, 2001, p.11). Describing a race as exclusively oppressive and false denies any opportunity for cultural mélanges and synchronicity. This illustrates the need for a critical pedagogy of whiteness.

A Critical Pedagogy of Whiteness

While the narratives of renegade white masculinity are often dependent on racialized appropriation, they also create space for coherent social critique. As a self-positioned urban "underclass" the culture of skateboarding, at the level of representation, is often quick to scrutinize corporate culture and its immanent encroachment upon "street life". Images and narratives within skateboarding can be mobilized within a "critical pedagogy of whiteness" (Giroux, 1997; McLaren, 2000; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2000). That is, skate texts are a useful medium for explaining representations of race insofar as they speak to the concerns and complexities of youth culture. These narratives can also be

used to initiate a critical dialogue with a particular version of whiteness. And while we should remain vigilant of racial stereotypes in skate media, it is also helpful to articulate an identity of whiteness not rooted in either oppression or guilt. A critical pedagogy of race is "about transforming the image, creating alternatives, asking ourselves questions about what types of images subvert, pose critical alternatives, and transform our worldviews and move us away from dualistic thinking about good and bad" (hooks, 1992, p.4). In realizing the multiple expressions of whiteness, it is more likely to understand and articulate the multi-faceted expressions of race, gender, sexuality, and class. As Kincheloe and Steinberg (2000) explain, "A critical pedagogy of whiteness is possible only if we understand in great specificity the multiple meanings of whiteness and their effects on the way white consciousness is historically and socially inscribed" (p.179). A critical pedagogy could also use skateboard texts to differentiate between an abolishment of whiteness and a rearticulation.

Borrowing from Baldwin, the "race traitor" maxim follows, "Treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity" (Winant, 2001, p.106). In some ways, skate narratives exemplify this remark with a symbolic critique of conformity. However, an eradication of race is, in many ways, untenable and even misguided. As Winant (2001) explains, the abolition of race is undesirable since race is "not simply the product of racism, of centuries of exploitation, exclusion, and domination, of the denial of freedom and even identity. No, it is also the product of centuries of resistance to racism, of determined refusal to accept racial oppression, and of wildly imaginative efforts to create identity" (p.111). In this sense, we may read skateboarding as a peculiar expression of whiteness based on a retreat from a fantasized whiteness. Indeed, as Rodriguez (2000) notes, "The counter-political project of rearticulating whiteness provides more opportunities for white students to respond to the legacy of white supremacy by instilling in them a sense of hope and purpose that they can use their own whiteness to undermine and/or challenge that legacy [of oppression]" (p.3). Such a redefinition may also expose the ways in which whiteness colonizes normativity at other points of articulation: class, gender, and sexuality.

By recognizing the white structures of oppressive authority, skate media may be used to explain both the colonial legacy and the hegemony of whiteness. In particular, many skate narratives present whiteness as a pattern of conspicuous consumption. By doing so, however, a text designed to criticize whiteness may help reify its cultural superiority by persistently linking it to the upper class. Not only does Michael Bolton music and J. Crew fashions connote whiteness, but they also signify privileged class positioning. Thus, the Huxtable family of the 1980s comedy series *The Cosby Show* often appeared "colorless", if not white, to a white audience simply by what they consume (Lewis, 1991). They lived in an affluent neighborhood, had white friends, and Cliff Huxtable repeatedly wore gaudy sweaters (Lewis, 1991). As Twine (1997) argues, "The importance of material consumption in conferring an identity that makes residents of any racial background culturally invisible [and visible]…cannot be overstated" (p.225). Since class relations are covert in American society, they link themselves with race (Jameson, 1992). That is, race functions as an allegory for class. This is how the Huxtables were able to pass as white; they consumed white upper-middle-class culture (and also downplay any institutional racism). The conflation of race and class is also evident in skate media.

Whiteness is often expressed as the "corporate Other" connoted by classed patterns of consumption: easy-listening music and "Khaki Republic" clothing. By Jameson's understanding, part of the hegemony of whiteness is its ability to align itself with privilege and normativity across the board. Thus, skate media can be used to frame the hegemony of whiteness as it applies to class. Whiteness, Frankenberg (1997) suggests, is always "intermeshed…with other webs of relations, including those of gender and sexuality, class, nation, and region" (p.21). Fixing race with class, then, drastically reduces the possibilities of imagining cultural practices beyond the color-line. Growing up white in North America calls for a lifelong project of "decolonizing" the mind and disassembling a racial (il)logic that makes Ben Hinckley a visual idiosyncrasy at North American ski resorts (A black snowboarder!?!).

Is there Skateboarding After Whiteness?

An overwhelming amount of skate media relies on renegade white masculinity to create a subversive image and sell products. Part of this rebellion is derived from an implicit refusal of middle-class whiteness. Within media texts, the construction of an acquiescent version of whiteness actually baptizes, by comparison, the "outlawed" skateboard culture. To sustain a textual rebellion, skateboarding needs a fantasy of whiteness. Is it possible for skateboarding to move beyond race as a resource for both its symbolic antithesis and its cultural reference point? Is there skateboarding after whiteness, and if so, what would it look like?

Whiteness in skateboarding is undoubtedly linked to a political economy of culture. It is constructed in a media edifice determined by the cash-nexus. As such, mediated skateboarding is, first and foremost, an industry of capitalism. Thus, it is important to illustrate the inexorable relationship between media, representation, and political economy. Doubtless, the portrayals of race, gender and class in skate media function on a larger economic level other than mere entertainment. Race sells! We must realize that a series of visual narratives depend upon negative images of whiteness to create an "authentic" representation of skateboarding and, therefore, sell commodities. Anti-whiteness creates a textual kinship between ghetto culture and street skating that lends an image of cool to products and the sport itself. So if skate culture were to suddenly lose its mediated representation or fall from the lucrative graces of marketability, would whiteness still exist in this subculture? If whiteness is the object of escape that ultimately validates the rebellion of skateboarding, what would the culture do after whiteness? How would it keep its punk image? Without whiteness, what forces of conformity would skateboarding struggle against? Perhaps the practice of crossing "race spaces" is the linchpin to understanding skate culture after whiteness.

Suburban skateparks – now hosted at shopping boutiques across North America – are, in no uncertain terms, classed and racialized spaces. One of the largest skateparks, owned by Vans footwear, is centered in the middle of "SoCal" affluence at the Block at Orange (an outdoor suburban shopping centre located near Disneyland). Such zones are

typically associated with white upper-middle-class skaters. An increasingly popular skate culture is indisputably lucrative for mall businesses and property owners. For this reason, mega skate complexes are erected in the commercial pavilions of affluent areas. As Beal and Wilson (forthcoming) suggest, "The mall park's primary goal was to increase their market, so they were oriented toward introducing and educating the novice to the *products* of the sport" (p.6, my italics). To be sure, skaters are tolerated in designated shopping malls so long as they stimulate the cogs of capitalism: they not only purchase passes to skateparks, but they also outfit themselves with expensive protective gear, fuel up on Taco Bell in the food court, and replace their broken decks at the skateshop for a hefty $80. These designated skate zones cater to the privileged (i.e., white, upper-middle-class skaters). Yet a bevy of white suburbanite skaters are seeking deliverance from the de-politicized spaces of the postmodern agora (the shopping mall). Certainly there is a classed, racialized, and gendered boundary in skateboarding, but there is also a persistent struggle carried out by youth to transgress the perimeters of being and acting white, middle-class and masculine.The very mobility of the skateboard provides movement away from suburbia and into the vast skate spots of urban centers. Skateboarding, then, presents an important challenge to a racial geography and the spatiality of whiteness.

As W.E.B. Du Bois noted long ago, "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line – the relation of the darker to the lighter races" (1990, p.16). There is an absence of interracial communications. Street skating, however, can be a practice in which racial boundaries of the cityscape are transcended. The direction skate culture is moving, on a general level, is actually piloting a way out of whiteness. That is, a waning involvement in the elitist vert skating is allowing droves of skaters to hit the streets of urban areas, not suburbia. In some ways, street skating works to raze the barriers of the color-line. Indeed, "meanings of a place are open to contestation – and with changing meanings comes changes in the ways of negotiating that place which, in turn, can lead to changes in social formations" (Beal & Wilson, forthcoming, p.3). Such activities are not limited by the costly construction of ramps or the veiled elitism of skating drained swimming pools. The relative affordability and locations of street skating provide greater opportunities for multi-racial and multi-class (but not multi-gender)

participation. In this sense, street skaters interact in an environment most effected by suburban sprawl and the invasion of the "box stores" (Wal-Mart, Home Depot, Ikea, and so on).

Moving beyond white spaces, the lived realities of urban youth are seriously altered by what Cornel West calls the "gangsterization of American culture": the erosion of civic support networks for families, neighborhoods, and public schools created in large part by a market morality of increased privatization and consumer-driven excess (Batstone, West, & Takaki, 1999). There are dual processes at work here. On the one hand, urban areas perceived to be artistic epicenters, like Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, are being gentrified at astonishing rates. Gentrification not only uproots an urban underclass, it also rids the newly affluent areas of "unsightly" citizens (including skaters). On the other hand, commerce is fleeing urban centers and resettling in what Garreau (1991) calls "edge cities". This development signals an advanced process in the "malling of America" in which commerce colonizes the suburban exterior, leaving only a carcass of capitalism in downtown areas. As Kelley (1997) explains, "Economic restructuring leading to permanent unemployment, the shrinking of city services, the rising number of abandoned buildings, the militarization of inner-city streets, the decline in parks, youth programs, and public schools, all have altered the terrain of play and creative expression" for urban youth (p.198). Indeed, the deteroriation and subsequent corporate predation of urban centers has introduced some skaters to the creative art of political protest.

In transcending the geographies of race, skateboarding is a locus for both a race consciousness and collective activism. Such was the case at the LOVE Park protest in Philadelphia. On an April afternoon in 2002, hundreds of skaters from in and around Philadelphia gathered to protest the immanent renovation or "skateproofing" of LOVE Park (Jackson, 2002, par.1). The event garnered the attention of several police officers, a large contingent of news reporters, and an array of inner city residents and bystanders gathered to support the Philadelphia skaters. As Jackson (2002) explains, "During a…skating intermission prompted by police activity, a 69-year-old blind woman spoke up

for the skaters. She talked about how the city is making criminals out of young people and the crowd hung on her every word" (par. 7). An exile from whiteness – both symbolically and physically – in skate narratives suggests there is most certainly a skateboard culture after whiteness. The struggle for space against market morality requires a social solidarity irregardless of race. As Bauman (1998) explains, "Urban territory becomes the battletfiled of continuous space war, sometimes erupting into the public spectacle of inner-city riots [and] ritual skirmishes with the police" (p.22).

Many skaters are well aware of the racialization and the class-ification of city space. They are also familiar with the existing contradictions resulting from the coalescence of urban geography and capital. Philadelphia, Jackson notes, "is a city that will welcome the *X-Games* and allow skateboarders to break the law at a place where only a few days earlier they were being hunted down and fined" (2002, par.8). Thus, the "official" cartography of skateboarding is sketched along multiple and contradictory lines by civic government and police surveillance. Through the practice of skateboarding, however, these racial and economic geographies are repeatedly crossed. The urban trespassing of skateboarding is also a youthful response to the pervasive privatizing of public space. In the end, "a territory stripped of public space provides little chance for norms being debated, for values to be confronted, to clash and to be negotiated" (Bauman, 1998, p.25). Skateboarding in both public and private space is also a hostile reaction to gentrification; "This city is willing to tear down a place that [skaters] worldwide dream about in order for a couple of tourists to drink coffee in a more visually pleasing environment" (Jackson, 2002, par.9). As the LOVE Park protest illustrates, suburban youth may work alongside residents of inner cities to struggle against a common enemy whose exclusive purpose is the accumulation of profit.

There *is* a skateboarding culture after whiteness. While it gets played out in skate media, a departure from whiteness is also physically evident on the streets. Skaters and skate journalists alike have realized the real incarnate of urban oppression. It is the band of adults issuing citations for helmet violations, trespassing, and destruction of property. And increasingly, it is the adults who gentrify legendary skate locations in urban

epicenters (like Love Park in Philadelphia) only to sell a corporate caricature of skateboarding to older audiences (like ESPN's *X-Games*). Conley (2001) succinctly captures the angst of urban youth: "Kids on big wheels were my peer group – regardless of complexion. Adults – white, black, other – constituted the alien race, the other. Race as we adults know it is something that has to be taught to us by parents, teachers, and society more generally" (p.31). So long as the lifeblood of skateboarding remains on the streets – exposed to successive waves of police and corporate harassment – it will embody a refusal of adulthood that will thrive long after whiteness. There is some indication, through editorials and commentaries, that skateboarding seeks "to celebrate how the desire to retain those outmoded principles of differentiation recedes when it confronts substantive varieties of otherness" embodied in transnational corporations (Gilroy, 2000, p.356). A struggle against ineffable corporations responsible for both cultural appropriation and the gentrification of inner city skate scenes is a struggle requiring trans-racial solidarity. It may be that a symbolic affinity with racial diversity in skateboarding "expresses real and widespread hunger for a world that is undivided by the petty differences we retain and inflate by calling them racial" (Gilroy, 2000, p.356). The anathema of skate culture will be less white than green; corporate greed and gentrification will matter more than the perceived bore of being white.

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